

CITYWIDE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

NEW BEDFORD

2025-2035

Strategy for The Next Decade

lighting the way NB new bedford

Citywide Comprehensive Plan
Stategy for the Next Decade

2025-2035

LETTER FROM MAYOR JON MITCHELL



Since the days when the towering masts of whaling ships dotted the harbor, New Bedford has been a distinct place in America. Its history, economy, and culture are a unique mix. First as the center of the world's whaling industry and today as the leading commercial fishing port in America, perhaps more than anywhere in America, the City's identity and its economic fortunes have been grounded in its connection to the sea and the intrepid souls who venture out from our docks. And yet the City's manufacturing economy gave rise to a dense ethnic melting pot of neighborhoods that have evolved with every new group of arrivals, each with its stories and cultures. New Bedford's vast cultural institutions and abundance of working artists continuously renew the City's vigor and enrich our way of life. Ours is a city connected to the past and enlivened to the future.

Since I began in office in 2012, we have strived to enhance these attributes. We have relentlessly executed a strategy to enhance the quality of life of all residents, and to strengthen and sustain its economic competitiveness. Our work together has led to objective improvements in key facets of city living – a sixty percent drop in violent crime, one of the country's largest improvements in high school graduation rates, a halving of the unemployment rate, and the highest bond rating in the City's history. It also has led to tangible city building achievements – a complete makeover of the port, the launching of the American offshore wind industry, five new parks, new waterside walkways, thousands of new trees, intercity rail service, and much more.

This Comprehensive Plan extends this work, and it offers a blueprint for building a City that is still more vibrant and resilient. It emphasizes our commitment to remaining a city that people will choose to live and work in, by delivering first-rate municipal services and promoting economic opportunity for all those willing to seek it. The Plan recognizes that New Bedford is a regional center, and a collection of distinct neighborhoods where everyone should feel like they belong.

This plan reflects the hard work of people inside and outside of City government who care deeply about New Bedford's future. It is our best effort to point us in a direction that preserves that which makes New Bedford special and enables us to adapt to an ever-changing world.

Sincerely,



Jon Mitchell
Mayor, City of New Bedford

Acknowledgements

Steering Committee

Rebecca Barnes
Cheryl Bartlett
Jonathan Carvalho
Paul Chasse
Jeffery Costa
Kathryn Duff
Kim Ferreira
Rosemary Gill
Michael Goodman
Dan Goulart
Isaiah Houtman
Angela Johnston
Kamile Khazan
Patricia Lareau
Renee Ledbetter
Paul Pawlowski
Michael Quinn
Anthony Sapienza
Steve Silverstein
Joseph Tavares
Shayne Trimbell
Adrian Ventura
Ed Washburn

Consultant Team

Agency Landscape + Design
- Brie Hensold
- Annie Streetman
- Yiyang Li

Hisel Flynn
- Katie Fylnn
- Odanrick Cabral
- Sarah Dunbar

Cambridge Econometrics
- Dan Hodge
- Ann Ormsbee

Innes Land Strategies Group
- Emily Innes
- Riveria Consulting
- Jon Hillman

City Staff

Department of City Planning
- Jennifer Carloni, Director of City Planning
- Anne Louro, Assistant City Planner and Preservation Planner
- Michael McCarthy, Assistant City Planner

Environmental Stewardship
- Michele Paul, Director
- Courtney Cohen, Environmental Project Manager

Facilities & Fleet Management
- Jennifer Veira, Director

Housing & Community Development
- Joshua Amaral, Director
- Jennifer Clarke, Deputy Director
- Ashley Eaton, Neighborhood Planner

Mayor's Office
- Jon Mitchell, Mayor
- Christina Connelly, Chief Operating Officer

Parks & Recreation
- Mary Rapoza, Director

Public Infrastructure
- Jamie Ponte, Commissioner
- Justin Chicca, Deputy Commissioner
- Shawn Syde, City Engineer

Public Schools
- Andrew O'Leary, Superintendent
- Barry Rabinovitch, School Construction Facilitator

Tourism & Marketing
- Ashley Payne, Director
- Amy Desrosiers, Tourism and Marketing Manager

Municipal Partners

Gordon Carr, Executive Director,
New Bedford Port Authority
Derek Santos, Executive Director,
New Bedford Economic Development Council
Margo Saulnier, Director of Creative Strategies,
New Bedford Creative

Comprehensive Planning

Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 41, Section 81D, requires cities and towns in Massachusetts to create and update their Comprehensive Plan every 10 years. The Comprehensive Plan is a planning policy document which guides the physical, social and economic growth of a community. It provides a vision for the future and outlines policies, goals, and actions to achieve that vision.

Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 41, Section 81D, requires that a Comprehensive Plan address nine elements: **land use, housing, economic development, history and culture, open space, mobility, and public facilities**. Within that framework, there is a great deal of latitude to craft a Plan that fits the individual needs for each community.

Foundation of this Plan

Our city's strong position today - with an active and growing Port, a burgeoning cultural and creative sector, a vibrant Downtown, and distinctive neighborhoods - did not come about by accident. New Bedford has a legacy of proactive planning. This legacy includes a commitment to comprehensive citywide planning as well as specific focus area plans and topic-based studies.

This Comprehensive Plan builds on and integrates current and past reports, studies, and outreach efforts. A Comprehensive Plan seeks to articulate a coordinated vision for strategic execution of the many efforts underway across the city.

Importantly, the plan was shaped by community engagement and reflects our city's values today. By incorporating the objectives of established, ongoing plans into the community-based goals developed through public engagement, the Comprehensive Plan offers greater predictability and consistency for residents, business owners, partners, advocates, City staff, and developers who will work together in the coming years.

Going forward, the plan will provide a basis for decision-making about land use and city investments. It will inform budget preparation, fundraising, grant opportunities, staffing, and capital improvement planning for public facilities and services. It will also guide and inform upcoming changes to zoning, policies, and programs.

1. **START UP**
   Data was collected, and the plan was introduced to the public.
2. **UNDERSTANDING TODAY**
   Existing conditions, history, and community needs in New Bedford were analyzed across the planning topics.
3. **COMMUNITY VISIONING**
   Together with the public and Steering Committee, project themes, goals, and supporting objectives were developed.
4. **REALIZING THE VISION**
   Detailed recommendations, actions, visual studies, and implementation were developed to demonstrate how the plan can be realized through projects, policies, and other initiatives

Public Planning Process

The New Bedford Comprehensive Plan was created through a collaborative process led by staff from the New Bedford Department of City Planning, guided by a Steering Committee, informed by local and regional Boards, Committees, and partners, and with support from the Mayor's Office, the New Bedford Economic Development Corporation, and other city departments. The plan was created over a year with extensive engagement and feedback from New Bedford residents, business owners, and employees. The planning process began in Fall 2022, concluded in the Fall of 2024, and was structured around four Steering Committee meetings and three major community engagement milestones. Online engagements, participation in pop-ups, focus groups, and interviews, and participation in public meetings provided additional feedback.

Steering Committee

A Steering Committee was assembled at the beginning of the planning process to guide content development of the plan, review the plan document, shape priorities, and help connect the plan to the community. The Steering Committee members are listed in the acknowledgement section of this document.









Focus Groups, Interviews, & Committees

During the course of the project, the plan benefited from the knowledge, background, and experience of topical experts, advocates, city staff, leadership, and partners who participated in thirty interviews, focus groups, and meetings that were held at various points during the process. They provided context and information on ongoing efforts around the topic areas of this plan.

Public Participation

The plan's ideas, priorities, and framework were shaped by and with New Bedford residents, visitors, and businesses. Engagement input was gathered through four public milestone engagement opportunities, a dedicated website, an online survey, interactive activities, pop-up activities at local events, and many visits to neighborhood group meetings. City media, social, and informational campaigns, including digital information and analog flyering in neighborhoods, helped increase awareness about the plan and solicited community, stakeholder, and staff feedback Materials were translated into Spanish, Portuguese, and Cape Verdean and interpretation was provided at meetings.

Contents

Introduction 5

Economic Competitiveness 16

Vibrant Neighborhoods 35

City Building 42

Land Use Framework 50

Introduction

New Bedford's story is one of resilience, shaped by extraordinary origins, tested by cycles of boom and bust, and defined by a spirit that continues to chart its course forward.



New Bedford is an enduring reflection of the distinctive circumstances of its founding. Whereas other American cities developed as trading or manufacturing hubs, beginning in the Mid-18th Century, New Bedford was built by and imbued with the spirit of the Yankee whaling industry. High seas whaling was a quintessentially American enterprise, whose emergence was fueled by the unbridled expansion of the young Republic and the audacity of those willing to hunt for years on-end the largest creatures in the sea. The industry's exponential growth in the first half of the 19th Century, coupled with its consolidation in New Bedford, made the city one of America's leading commercial centers. By the eve of the Civil War, New Bedford had become the wealthiest city in the United States, and in seaports across the globe New Bedford became synonymous with American capitalism. As Melville famously observed, "No where will you find more patrician houses, gardens more opulent, than in New Bedford."

In seeming paradox to its outward manifestations of wealth, the City's culture reflected the deep religiosity of its Quaker leaders, whose zealous egalitarianism expressed itself in an unyielding antipathy toward slavery, even before the American Revolution. New Bedford would become not only a leading center for abolitionism, but it also emerged as the leading haven for fugitive slaves, reflecting a collective commitment to equality in deeds and not just in words. According to the most famous of those fugitive slaves to reach New Bedford, Frederick Douglass, "I was for once made glad by a view of extreme wealth, without being saddened by seeing extreme poverty. But the most astonishing as well as the most interesting thing to me was the condition of the colored people, a great many of whom, like myself, had escaped thither as a refuge from the hunters of men." One historian of the era characterized New Bedford as "Freedom's Gibraltar" for fugitive slaves, and estimated that by the Civil War, New Bedford had the highest per capita population of fugitive slaves.



The Civil War and the emergence of the modern petroleum industry brought the golden age of whaling to an end, leading to its gradual decline in the second half of the 19th Century. New Bedford's story since then has been a city that has experienced boom and bust cycles more dramatic than most places: a slow recovery after the Civil War, rapid urbanization in the late-19th century fueled by cotton textiles and a surge of European immigrants, the abrupt flight of the textile industry at the beginning of the Great Depression, the City's emergence after the Second World War as a national leader in commercial fishing, and the late-century contraction of manufacturing in the face of foreign competition. The City's economic instability over most of the Twentieth Century manifested itself in the decline of investment capital, chronically high unemployment, a declining population and tax base, and pessimism among residents about the City's capacity to reverse its fortunes.

At times, New Bedford's economy has been insufficiently diversified to weather global economic shocks, its leadership has not always anticipated and prepared residents for the future, and its businesses and residents have not always worked in unison. And yet at times the City has made the right choices for itself, such as when it established the Business Park and Historic District, two economic assets that have paid enormous dividends. More recently, the City's successful efforts to establish the offshore wind industry here, modernize the port, invest in the arts and culture, reform the school system, rationalize the management of the city's municipal operations and finances, and improve the appearance of the City's built environment, will have a lasting positive effect on the city's fortunes. Perhaps more importantly, New Bedford residents are proud to call it home, who are open to new ideas, and are willing to work with others for the greater good of the City.

Forming a Strategy

New Bedford is a vibrant and diverse city that honors its roots while embracing progress and development.

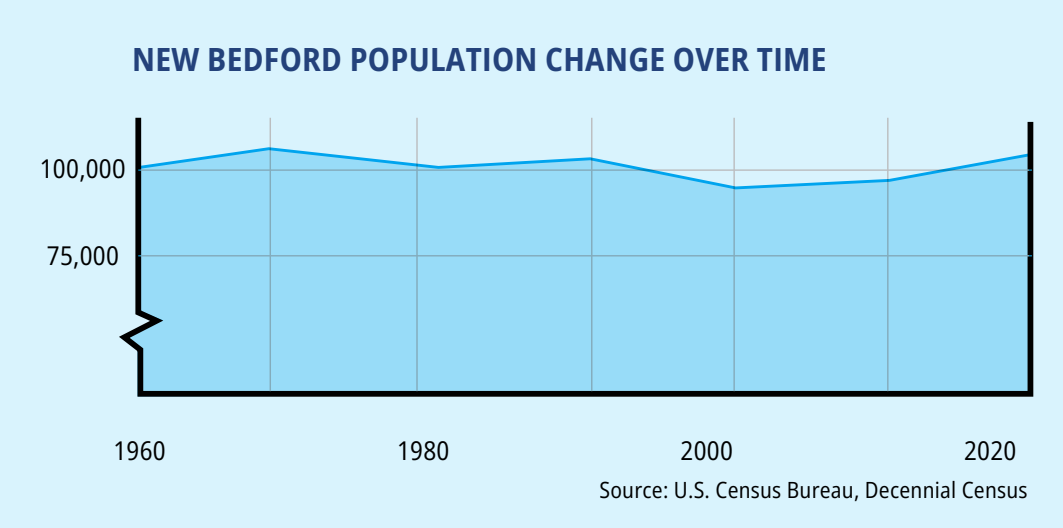
Forming a strategy starts with an assessment of basic facts, even at the risk of stating that which is familiar, or even obvious. New Bedford is a mid-sized city with a population just over 100,000 residents that is surrounded by suburbs in a geographically and culturally distinct region. In contrast to satellite cities of major metropolitan areas, New Bedford is the economic and cultural hub of its region, and its fortunes, therefore, are not directly tied to that of another city.

New Beford is twenty-four square miles in size, and its configuration is not compact, but elongated. Its primary economic assets are its port and its cultural assets, which offer opportunities for growth and diversification. Most notably, New Bedford is America's highest grossing commercial fishing port and largest center for seafood processing. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been invested in the port in recent years, and the port is now regarded as a leader in the emerging offshore wind industry. The city's cultural sector is one of the strongest in the country, with one of highest concentrations of working artists and thriving cultural institutions.



Building on Strengths and Locational Advantages

Given its relative proximity to other cities and the physical limitations of its political borders and its port, it is not foreseeable that New Bedford can grow into a major metropolis. Nevertheless, given the advantages of its location, the strength of its economic assets and institutions, the size and density of its population, its relatively temperate climate, the sense of place shared by its residents, New Bedford has the potential to achieve a level of agency that is ultimately the mark of a successful city, that is, the ability to stand on its own two feet.



The City of New Bedford is home to 101,079 people today.

The community is projected to grow by 4.2% by 2040, reaching 105,284 people.

The average household size is 2.3 people per unit.

Cities need not be massive to be successful. Mid-sized cities like New Bedford can offer many of the positive elements of urbanity – walkability, cultural offerings, night life, and diverse neighborhoods – without the negatives found in many large cities – traffic congestion, high living costs, and in certain cases, higher violent crime. Mid-sized cities can offer a way of life that is varied and interesting, as well as greater opportunity for residents to form personal connections. For these reasons, mid-sized cities often foster a strong sense of belonging among their residents, contributing to a high quality of life that can be less attainable in large metropolises. They can successfully offer a sweet spot for those desiring activity without the intensity of a major urban center.

In forming a comprehensive strategy, New Bedford must look to leverage the competitive advantages of the mid-sized city and its own unique location advantages and core values. In various addresses, Mayor Mitchell has articulated a vision for New Bedford, which provides a basis for the strategy laid out in this plan:

A City that is the cultural, economic and political center of a distinct region;

A City with a diverse and competitive economy that offers opportunity for everyone who seeks it;

A City with a professional, caring, and efficient municipal government that commands the confidence of taxpayers;

A City recognized for its physical beauty, cultural richness and the compassion of its residents, and where everyone feels like they belong; and

A City that takes responsibility for its future.

The Elements of New Bedford's Strategy

New Bedford's strategy unites economic competitiveness, thriving neighborhoods, strategic city building, and modernized land use to create a resilient, vibrant, and forward-looking city.

1

Economic Competitiveness

New Bedford must have a diversified local economy that is capable of absorbing the shocks from global markets and can withstand downturns in individual industries and continue to grow. City government must collaborate with businesses to build on existing industry clusters, develop new competitive advantages on which new clusters can grow, and enable the businesses that call the city home to compete effectively.

2

Thriving Neighborhoods

New Bedford has a City government which supports strong, vibrant neighborhoods that are safe to raise a family, are comprised of housing that is attainable to all, supports vibrant small businesses and provides amenities that enrich connections among neighbors.

3

Strategic City Building

The City is committed to strategic planning and effective data-driven decision making for effective government. The City of New Bedford understands that city building is a strategic and interconnected process involving multiple disciplines and continuous progress in many areas simultaneously. The City considers projects and policies in relation to the broader needs of neighborhoods and the entire municipality, rather than in isolation. This unified perspective extends beyond the physical environment to the shared responsibility to pursue toward our common goals – recognizing how the built environment affects the social fabric of the city. As such, each project and each initiative advances and affirms the vision of New Bedford as a special city where people choose to live and raise their families, to work and grow innovative businesses, and to visit as a compelling destination that enriches their lives.

4

Modernizing Land Use

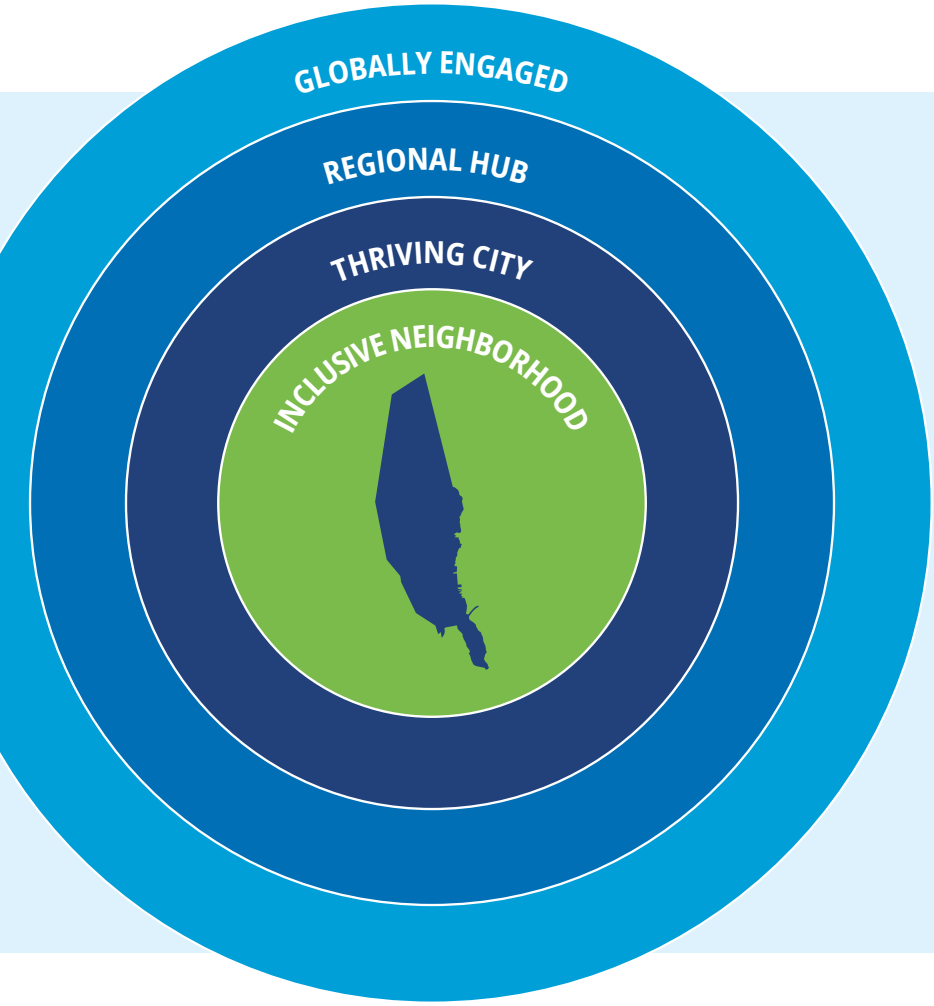
To remain a viable economic competitor, support housing development, and strategically approach city building, the City must align land use policies with our vision for the city and continue to adjust our zoning ordinance to respond to modern needs. Once this Comprehensive Plan is approved by the Planning Board, as required by state law, the City will need to revise its zoning to align with the recommendations and further refine zoning based on any succeeding neighborhood plans.

Plan Perspectives

Together we can work to advance the shared vision of New Bedford as a thriving city with inclusive neighborhoods, regional impact and global connectivity.

New Bedford serves as the metropolitan hub of the region, making it essential that future development and progress are guided by thoughtful planning. The Comprehensive Plan embraces that legacy, leveraging existing initiatives and studies, and building upon our assets.

The Plan is a guide and a framework that will offer greater predictability and consistency for residents, business owners, partners, advocates, city staff, and developers who will work together over the next decade. Importantly, the Plan was shaped by resident engagement and is a reflection of the city's collective vision and values today.



PLANNING AT ALL SCALES

New Bedford is unique among other cities in the breadth of its broad impact, well beyond its city boundaries. As a city with a long history of innovation and of welcoming diverse residents, this plan emphasizes the city's important connections at the city, regional, and even global scales. These perspective scales emerged from initial rounds of community input where residents expressed their pride in the city's expanded role and in its local neighborhoods.

NEW BEDFORD IS GLOBALLY ENGAGED

New Bedford is unique among other cities in the breadth of its broad impact, well beyond its city boundaries. As a city with a long history of innovation and of welcoming diverse residents, this plan emphasizes the city's important connections at the city, regional, and even global scales. These perspective scales emerged from initial rounds of community input where residents expressed their pride in the city's expanded role and in its local neighborhoods.





The City of New Bedford has a long and evolving history of global engagement, shaped by its maritime roots, diverse population, and forward-looking economic development. In the 19th century, New Bedford earned international recognition as the whaling capital of the world, sending ships to every ocean and exporting whale oil that illuminated homes and cities across the globe. In the early 20th century, the city became a hub of textile manufacturing, linking New Bedford to international markets through trade in goods and raw materials.

New Bedford's identity is deeply tied to international trade, migration, and innovation. The city's maritime industries attracted diverse workforces from different countries. As the "City that Lit the World", New Bedford has long been a beacon for freedom and a place for new beginnings. The city was a renowned safe-haven along the Underground Railroad and over centuries, the port has drawn waves of immigrants from different places around the world. As a result, the city has a diverse population, rich cultural heritage, and connections with international communities across the globe.

Today, New Bedford's port is a major player in the global seafood industry, as the highest grossing fishing port in the country, and the homeport for America's first commercial scale offshore wind project. The sustained success of the fishing industry and the diversification of the waterfront to include offshore wind represent New Bedford's intentional focus on port-related development and commitment to sustainability. Through strategic planning, the city has positioned itself as a leader in the global blue economy.

Looking to the future, New Bedford is also positioned to become a global leader in sustainable innovation. Investments in renewable energy, climate resilience, and blue economy industries such as marine sciences and ocean technology are placing the city at the forefront of international collaboration. Institutions such as UMass Dartmouth's School for Marine Science & Technology (SMAST) collaborate with global research organizations on fisheries, climate change, and ocean science and the recently formed New Bedford Ocean Cluster is positioning New Bedford as a globally connected leader in the blue economy by fostering innovation, sustainability, and international collaboration across key maritime sectors.

NEW BEDFORD IS A REGIONAL HUB

As the regional center, New Bedford boasts a strong economy, a low unemployment rate, a skilled workforce and a continuous expansion of diverse industries including marine sciences, life sciences, manufacturing, retail, technology, healthcare, service, tourism, and emerging sectors such as medical device manufacturing and renewable energy. New Bedford's primary economic drivers are its port and its rich cultural assets, both of which present significant opportunities for growth and diversification. As the nation's highest-grossing commercial fishing port and the largest hub for seafood processing, it plays a vital role in the regional economy.









Complementing its economic strengths, New Bedford boasts one of the strongest cultural sectors in the country, featuring a high concentration of working artists and flourishing cultural institutions that enrich the city's vibrancy and appeal and have created the ambiance of a vibrant coastal cultural center.

Downtown New Bedford is home to numerous local, state, and federal government offices, drawing a bustling regional workforce and clients to the city daily. The city has actively pursued opportunities to attract additional state and federal agencies to the downtown while advocating for the replacement of aging courthouses to better serve the needs of the region.

The transportation infrastructure that connects New Bedford to the surrounding communities includes Interstate 195, Route 140, a regional airport, regional bus service and year-round ferry service to Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket and Cuttyhunk Islands. Freight service is available by ocean, air and rail. InterCity rail service has been re-established as of March 2025.

NEW BEDFORD IS A THRIVING CITY

New Bedford offers an exceptional quality of life with significant geographical, cultural and recreational assets. The National Trust for Historic Preservation named New Bedford one of the dozen Distinctive Destinations in the United States for good reason. New Bedford's seaport, diverse neighborhoods, rich history, eclectic architecture, vast cultural resources and a growing arts community make it a compelling destination for visitors and an attractive place to live.











The City has several well-defined neighborhoods spreading southward and northward from downtown, many within the City's 14 National Register Historic Districts. The well-preserved historic architecture ranges from craftsman bungalows and the classic four-square to sprawling Victorian mansions.

Each neighborhood in New Bedford has its unique character and strengths, making the city a dynamic and engaging place to live. Generally, the city's neighborhoods are characterized by a mix of residential streets with small local businesses and eateries which often reflect the city's diverse ethnic heritage. Nearly every city resident lives within a 10-minute walk of a recreational asset, as the city boasts six major parks, twenty-four neighborhood parks, and over 12 miles of trails and bikeways, including the "Blue Lane", a unique contiguous set of recreational pathways atop the city's hurricane barrier connecting neighborhoods and attractions and commerce.

Tenement-style housing plays a significant role in the revitalization of many dense neighborhoods in New Bedford, blending historical preservation with modern urban development. These structures, which once symbolized the city's industrial boom, are being repurposed to meet contemporary housing needs while maintaining their cultural and architectural significance. The continued use of this multi-family housing type ensures that revitalization respects the city's past while embracing its future.

NEW BEDFORD IS A CITY OF INCLUSIVE, VIBRANT NEIGHBORHOODS

New Bedford is committed to cultivating strong, vibrant neighborhoods that are safe, welcoming, and inclusive for all residents. Each of the city's neighborhoods contributes to New Bedford's identity and quality of life, offering a diverse range of housing options, cultural traditions, and community assets. From historic districts and waterfront areas to mixed-income residential streets and commercial corridors, the city's neighborhoods are at the heart of its social and economic vitality.





Recognizing the distinct character of each neighborhood, New Bedford is advancing planning and zoning strategies that strengthen community identity while preparing for future growth. Modern zoning tools, including Form-Based Code and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) principles—are central to this effort. These strategies ensure that new development enhances the city's historic fabric, improves walkability, and fosters lively, mixed-use community hubs where people can live, work, shop, and gather.

A hyperlocal approach to planning is key. By engaging directly with residents, neighborhood groups, and local businesses, the City can tailor investments that reflect community priorities and reinforce neighborhood identity. This approach enables targeted improvements in public infrastructure, parks, open spaces, and recreational facilities while also supporting neighborhood-scale economic development.

New Bedford's commitment to vibrant neighborhoods extends to equitable economic growth. By nurturing local businesses, strengthening commercial corridors, and encouraging entrepreneurship, the City is fostering opportunity for residents at every scale—from small homegrown enterprises to established employers. Neighborhood business districts are being reinforced as places of daily life and commerce, offering services and amenities within walking distance of homes.

At the same time, New Bedford is investing in inclusive housing strategies that balance preservation of the city's historic building stock with the creation of new housing opportunities. These efforts expand housing choices for residents of all incomes and life stages, ensuring that the city's neighborhoods remain affordable, stable, and accessible.

Above all, the vision for New Bedford's neighborhoods is one of **inclusivity, vibrancy, and connection**. By integrating land use, housing, transportation, and economic development strategies with a focus on neighborhood character and identity, New Bedford is strengthening the bonds between residents and their communities and creating places where all can thrive.



1 Economic Competitiveness

IN HIS 2025 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS, MAYOR MITCHELL ASSERTED,

“No city can sustain itself in the long run if it isn’t economically competitive. We in Greater New Bedford are competing in a global economy for investment and jobs, and if we don’t compete effectively, they will go elsewhere, as our city has come to realize the hard way over the years.”

Over the last decade, the City and its partners have purposefully committed to leveraging our unique advantages to strengthen our foundational industry clusters, support new development, and cultivate sustainable growth.

New Bedford's diverse economy is built upon a stable foundation of the maritime, manufacturing, arts and culture, and human services clusters. New Bedford's coastal location and deepwater harbor support a globally renowned seafood industry, which in turn sustains the maritime industrial cluster that makes New Bedford an attractive location for other aspects of the ocean economy like offshore wind. While today New Bedford is still home to premier clothing manufacturers, over time our manufacturing cluster has responded to shifts in the global economy and diversified to include biomedical manufacturing, specialized seafood processing, and sporting goods like golf balls and basketball backboards. Our diverse manufacturing base insulates the city's economy from downturns in one industry—an outcome that has played out time and again in New Bedford and other American cities.

New Bedford is the preferred destination for a wide array of artistic and cultural experiences. From world-class public art and dynamic programming to the diverse culinary offerings of our ethnic bakeries and restaurants, the city thrives as a destination for creativity and expression. Downtown's galleries and museums showcase local and international talent, while the Zeiterion Theatre brings acclaimed touring productions to the heart of the region. By fostering an environment rich in artistic innovation and cultural vitality, the city not only attracts visitors in search of novel experiences but also serves as a catalyst for broader economic investment beyond the arts.

Being the regional center also means that New Bedford is where critical services locate themselves. Our human services cluster, for example, is anchored by the presence of Southcoast Health, the major healthcare provider in the region, and our top employer.

Individually, New Bedford's core economic clusters support their own ancillary industries. In concert, however, they power the Greater New Bedford economy by employing tens of thousands of people, generating business opportunities for entrepreneurs, and justifying strategic public infrastructure improvements. Longterm planning to support these clusters must be built upon sound analysis. The comprehensive planning process frames out an overall strategy, but more detailed economic data should be compiled to understand the granular needs and future opportunities for each cluster.

That final point should come as no surprise, as New Bedford is transforming itself into a city that makes sound policy decisions based on reliable data and thorough analyses. Indeed, the strides made to grow and diversify the city's economy over the last decade have their roots in the stability and increased efficiency of the municipal government and the support of its partners, such as the New Bedford Economic Development Council, the New Bedford Port Authority, the New Bedford Ocean Cluster, the New Bedford Creative Consortium, and the Greater New Bedford Industrial Foundation. Through deliberate policymaking and investments to support our competitive advantages, the City and its partners have increased overall employment, solicited global businesses to locate here, and supported the local businesses and entrepreneurs who make the city's neighborhoods thrive.

The New Bedford Economic Development Council (NBEDC), serves as the city's lead non-profit economic development agency, which in conjunction with the Mayor's Office, sets the agenda for the city's key strategic economic development areas.

The New Bedford Port Authority's primary charge is to support The Port of New Bedford through the implementation of best management practices over port resources and the development of economic growth strategies.

The New Bedford Ocean Cluster (NBOC) is a collaborative initiative that connects businesses, researchers, and organizations in the marine sector to drive innovation, sustainability, and economic growth. It focuses on industries such as commercial fishing, offshore wind, aquaculture, and marine technology.

The New Bedford Creative Consortium is the leadership group whose purpose is overseeing the execution of the citywide strategic Arts and Culture Plan.

The Greater New Bedford Industrial Foundation manages and promotes the New Bedford Business Park to attract, retain, and support businesses that drive regional economic growth.






ROLLDOCK

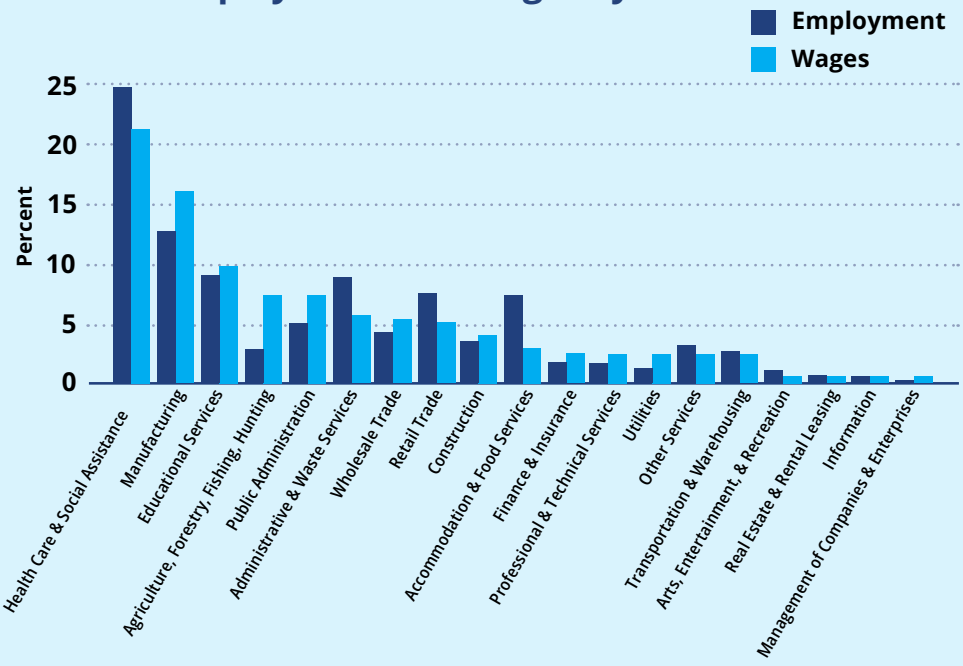
New Bedford Today

Employment & Business

In recent years, New Bedford has maintained a healthy annual unemployment rate of roughly 5% and a stable labor force participation rate of 62%, which equates to more than 47,000 workers. The Port is a critical driver of the regional economy and central to New Bedford's economic identity. Indeed, the economic value of the Port was recently estimated to be $11.1 billion, with direct employment in port-related businesses estimated to be 6,808 people.

Emphasizing the centrality of the maritime industry and the Port is not to discount the diverse economic base in New Bedford. New Bedford has a wide range of employment representations across nearly all sectors. The health care and social assistance sector dominates employment both for New Bedford residents and workers in the city, accounting for about a quarter of jobs for each group. The manufacturing sector is also a major employer in the city, driven by apparel manufacturing at the Joseph Abboud manufacturing facility in New Bedford and golf equipment manufacturing at Acushnet Company facilities in the city, as well as the robust seafood production, preparation, and packaging industry.

Share of Employment and Wages by Sector in New Bedford, 2021



3,700

Total Number of Businesses

36,000

Total Jobs

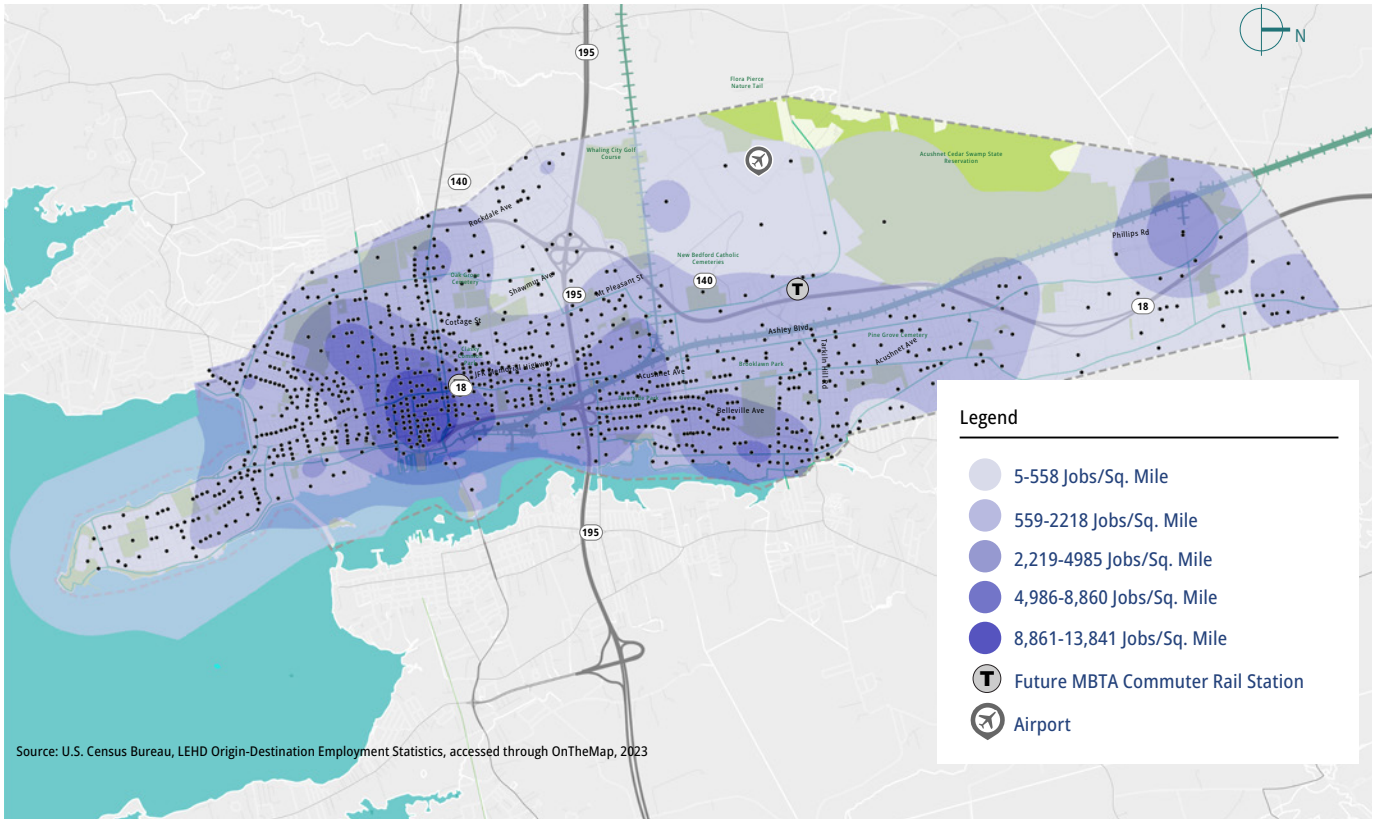
Source: Massachusetts Department of Economic Research, Employment and Wages (ES-202)

New Bedford's traditional manufacturing base is increasingly complemented by design-driven and science-based production. A comprehensive report on the city's creative economy: *The Composition of the New Bedford Creative Economy 2019-2022 and Economic Impacts*, identifies a number of creative companies engaged in manufacturing. Companies like Ahead in apparel, Poyant in signage and branding, and Standard Modern in printing all reflect the enduring influence of New Bedford's historic textile and manufacturing expertise. While tools and processes have become increasingly digital, New Bedford remains a place where design and production intersect. This legacy presents a strategic opportunity for New Bedford to position the convergence of art, science, and technology as a key attribute of its modern industrial landscape.



Further, New Bedford's creative economy is a distinct, diverse subsector itself – representing everything from cultural institutions and performing arts centers to fine arts and culinary design, which all contribute to the city's unique arts and culture brand. According to the Creative Economy report, as of 2022, the creative economy accounts for 3,370 direct jobs and $300 million in revenue.

Employment in New Bedford is concentrated in a few key geographic sections of the city. This map of employment concentrations in the city shows both the number and density of jobs. As reflected in the following map, employment is concentrated in the downtown area and around the waterfront / port area. These areas are home to many of the city's restaurants, retail businesses, medical buildings, cultural and historical centers, and port-related industries like fishing, seafood processing, and ferry boats (as well as residential buildings and future offshore wind logistics). Areas where fewer jobs are located to the west of MA Route 140, an area which encompasses the regional airport, a large swamp, and municipal golf course.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics, accessed through OnTheMap, 2023

Forging New Bedford's Future: A Growth Strategy for a Distinct Regional Economy Driven by Competitive Advantages

The disproportionate flow of capital in the direction of major metropolitan areas is one of the most consequential economic trends in the last 30 years affecting New Bedford's prospects. Due to the constraints of distance, New Bedford does not have the luxury of tying itself to another major metropolitan area. While inter-city rail service represents another economic asset, it does not significantly reduce the travel time to Boston. Simply becoming a bedroom community of another city is not realistic for New Bedford, even if it were desirable. Thus, as it has been since the early days of the whaling industry, New Bedford remains the central city of its own distinct economic region.

As the hub of its own distinct economic region, New Bedford is shaping a modern, resilient economy that leverages its unique strengths and strategic location to secure long-term prosperity.

The economic self-reliance of Greater New Bedford means that the City and the business community must build a modern and resilient economy around New Bedford's strengths and locational advantages. Foremost for the purposes of this Plan, this means a City government that is reliable and predictable. Political stability and an efficiently run local government signal to businesses that New Bedford is a safe place to invest and affords its residents a high quality of life. City government must also be responsive to the changing needs of the economy and engage with business leaders and residents during policy-making to develop policies and regulations that incentivize investment and competitiveness.

Good government and sound policies alone, however, are not enough to sustain a competitive regional economy. New Bedford's continued success comes from recognizing our unique competitive advantages – a dynamic maritime industry in our deepwater port, a thriving arts and culture sector that celebrates the history and diversity of New Bedford, a strong manufacturing base that provides well-paying jobs without requiring an extensive formal education, and the small businesses that make New Bedford's neighborhoods thrive.

These competitive advantages serve as the foundation for the City's strategic approach to long-term economic development which is based on the following fundamental principles:

- Pursue and support aggressive cluster driven growth by leveraging our natural location advantages, such as those demonstrated in maritime industries, manufacturing, and arts & culture-based enterprises.
- Bolster the concentration of business and cultural activity in the downtown, cementing it as the region's urban core.
- Champion existing small businesses and entrepreneur development through financial, technical, and other assistance.
- Strong and well-maintained infrastructure is not merely a necessity, but the very foundation upon which New Bedford's future prosperity and vibrancy will be built.
- Through teamwork, mutual accountability and persistent effort, the city, businesses community and residents can continue to build an economy that creates opportunity for our all.

Each of these principles are outlined further in the pages to follow and all rely on the fundamental need for strong partnerships, sound planning and data analysis, dedicated resources, and the ability to tell our story to a wide audience. In so far as individual opportunities will always present themselves at various times, we may need to exercise flexibility in our approach to maximize our advantage when in pursuit of those opportunities for business expansion or new development. However, the principles of our overarching strategic approach must remain steadfast as we look to solidify our role as the center of a distinct regional economy.

Cluster Driven Development



Over the past thirteen years of the Mitchell administration, the City, the New Bedford Economic Development Council (NBEDC), and the region's business community have developed an economic development strategy that is built on the expansion of Greater New Bedford's existing business clusters. Clusters are concentrations of businesses, institutions and individuals associated with the same or related industries whose collective competitiveness is enhanced by ready access to skilled labor, specialized infrastructure, and useful information. Clusters tend to form around a region's locational advantages, but once they grow and evolve, the emergence of the networks around the cluster expand those advantages.

Although the formation and growth of clusters is driven primarily by the private sector, city government can play an important role in facilitating their development. As perhaps best articulated by the leading scholar on business clusters, Professor Michael Porter of the Harvard Business School, efforts must be directed to strengthening a cluster's competitive advantages:

Government should reinforce and build on established and emerging clusters, rather than attempt to create entirely new ones. New industries and new clusters emerge best from established ones. Businesses involving advanced technology do not succeed in a vacuum, but where there is already a base of less sophisticated activities in the field. Clusters form where a foundation of locational advantages exists to build on.

Cluster development efforts must embrace the pursuit of competitive advantage and specialization, rather than attempt to imitate exactly what is present in other locations. This requires building on local differences and sources of uniqueness where possible, turning them into strengths.

New Bedford's continued economic success and future growth are linked to our ability to maintain the competitive advantages of our key economic drivers – the maritime, manufacturing, and creative economy clusters.

While a formal cluster analysis is beyond the scope of this Plan, it is paramount that the City, NBEDC, and other critical stakeholders collaborate on efforts to analyze each of the targeted clusters to identify specific and actionable opportunities for growth, target current and needed support for emerging sectors, and guard against decline by promoting and facilitating innovation. The following are specific explorations of the major economic clusters.

MARITIME LEADERSHIP



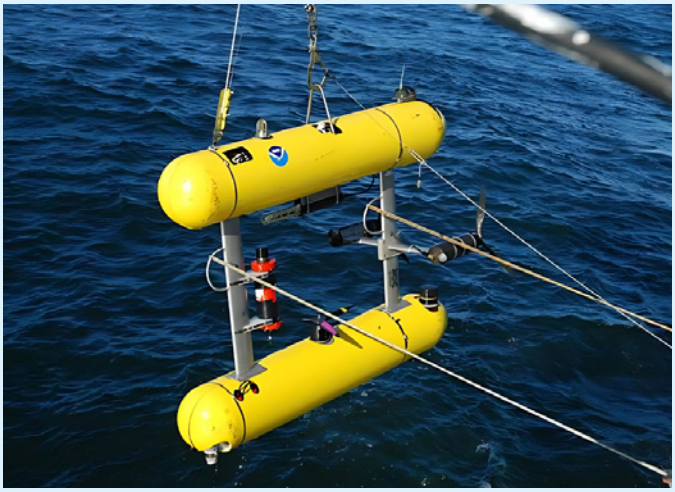
HISTORICALLY, THE PORT OF NEW BEDFORD WAS A WORLD-FAMOUS WHALING SEAPORT. TODAY, THE PORT IS THE NATION'S TOP COMMERCIAL FISHING PORT BY VALUE, A TITLE IT HAS CONSISTENTLY EARNED FOR OVER TWO DECADES.

Today, as the number one valued seafood port in the country for the past quarter century, fishing and seafood processing remain the central drivers of our maritime economy. However, the maritime industrial cluster that has developed around the commercial fishing sector can also support other maritime industries that complement what our central waterfront does so well. Indeed, New Bedford's status as a full-service industrial port was a critical factor in its selection as the first maritime hub for the American offshore wind industry.

Developing the strategy to support the growth of New Bedford's maritime cluster will be led by the New Bedford Port Authority and supported most directly by the New Bedford Ocean Cluster (NBOC). While that comprehensive effort is beyond the scope of this plan, the following elements will generally be included in that work:

- **Business Development** Analyze trends in the maritime sector, including the emergence of new technologies, and understand how our competitive advantages can be leveraged to enable maritime businesses to thrive here. This includes not only fishing, offshore wind and recreational boating, but also marine construction and logistics, cargo, and transportation.
- **Port Infrastructure** Maintain our existing port infrastructure and ensure a pipeline of new projects, which include renovations of Homer's Wharf and the State Pier, the expansion of the New Bedford Marine Commerce Terminal, the reconstruction of the Pope's Island Marina, the establishment of a marine test bed, and the dredging of the federal channel.
- **Marine Technology** Continue to position New Bedford as an advantageous place to develop and deploy new marine technologies. The density of maritime activity, coupled with the appealing quality of life the city offers, makes the Port and its surroundings fertile ground for marine innovation and research.





- **Promotion, Marketing and Recruitment** Develop a marketing strategy that elevates the brand of the port and branding and promotion strategy casts New Bedford as not a one-industry port, but a multi-sector center of maritime commerce.
- **Connecting the City to the Waterfront** Deepening the integration of the city and waterfront, particularly on and in the vicinity of the State Pier, is essential to promote the public's understanding and appreciation of what New Bedford does on the water and attract tourism.
- **Leadership mindset** New Bedford is uniquely positioned to serve as a thought leader in maritime innovation and research, drawing on its centuries-long legacy as a working waterfront and global port. As a national leader in commercial fishing and an early hub for offshore wind development, New Bedford offers an unparalleled combination of industry expertise, working waterfront infrastructure, research capacity, and community support. Entities such as the NBOC, National Offshore Wind Institute of Bristol Community College, the School for Marine Science & Technology of UMass Dartmouth, the Buzzards Bay Coalition and the City-owned and multi-functional Quest enterprise hub are forming partnerships and advancing innovation in marine science, ocean technology, aquaculture, climate resilience, and port sustainability, placing New Bedford at the cutting edge of applied maritime research.

Given this expertise, New Bedford is the natural location for large-scale convenings of policymakers, researchers, industry leaders, and community stakeholders focused on the future of the blue economy. The city offers not only the infrastructure and industry knowledge but also the cultural richness and civic engagement needed to host meaningful, action-oriented dialogues. As global challenges related to climate change, food security, and ocean health intensify, New Bedford stands ready to lead the conversation and shape the future of ocean innovation through collaboration, vision, and impact.

MANUFACTURING PATHWAYS



NEW BEDFORD STANDS OUT AS A PLACE WHERE DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING MEET. THE CITY'S CREATIVE ECONOMY INCLUDES NUMEROUS COMPANIES ENGAGED IN MANUFACTURING, OFFERING A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO SPOTLIGHT THE POWERFUL CONVERGENCE OF ART, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY IN OUR INDUSTRIAL NARRATIVE.

The City must continue to understand what other advantages it can capitalize on in manufacturing and go beyond what is has been traditionally seen as largely suburban style manufacturing in our city's successful business park—an economic driver for the entire region since the late 1950s.

In the short term, the City and its economic development partners will be in a stronger position to recruit businesses at the new Advanced Manufacturing Campus (AMC), a 100-acre site that has been freed up for commercial purposes at our municipal golf course, as well as other sites assembled by the New Bedford Redevelopment Authority.

For instance, the City should explore how the presence of golf equipment and apparel manufacturers can attract similar companies, further solidifying and expanding our market position in this industry. Furthermore, how the presence of a sizable regional medical provider could be a strong draw for additional medical equipment, life sciences, and medical instrumentation firms. New Bedford's extensive international connections, particularly with Portugal, may be an opportunity to attract direct investment from international entities seeking a U.S. presence. Our airport's potential as a viable alternative for commercial air service should be assessed, especially as carriers face increasing costs in Boston and Providence. Finally, the City and the NBEDC should work together to identify the necessary sites, adopt flexible zoning, and provide resources to support smaller craft manufacturing companies and entrepreneurs as welcomed additions to diverse and tight knit neighborhoods.

The potential to develop new manufacturing focused opportunities should be thoroughly analyzed and, where actionable opportunities are identified, they should be developed through thoughtful and collaborative planning. The City is now in a stronger position to attract new manufacturing, and it must be intentional in aligning its workforce programs to support this effort.





As the City's lead economic development agency, the NBEDC will largely lead the business recruitment efforts to support the growth and diversification of New Bedford's manufacturing cluster, but this will certainly be an all-in effort with many local and regional partners at the table. The strategic approach that will be taken will be anchored by the following elements:

- Conduct a detailed analysis of the future build-out potential of the sites occupied by companies that call the New Bedford Business Park home as a means to support the growth of the manufacturing companies already in New Bedford and employing over 5,000 people throughout the city.
- Identify specific sites throughout the city that can support mid to larger scale manufacturing centered businesses. This should start with municipally controlled parcels, underutilized, and vacant sites located in areas that do not conflict with current or future residential uses. This inventory should be matched by an analysis of the infrastructure in place or needed that will support manufacturing and offer competitive advantage to these sites when recruiting private sector investment.
- As New Bedford reevaluates its zoning ordinances, the City must include uses flexible enough to allow for small-scale artisan manufacturing outside of traditionally industrial-zoned areas. Having the creative economy enmeshed in the neighborhood fabric would further demonstrate how central the arts and culture sector is to the New Bedford's identity.
- Develop and execute a business recruitment campaign that has three audiences. First, and perhaps most obvious, is to market New Bedford to audiences outside of the city and region to those companies looking to expand in a place that embraces manufacturing. Second, is to market the many services that already exist to support the growth of our existing companies. Third, is to attract new entrepreneurs to the possibilities of smaller scale artisan manufacturing, and provide the specific services needed that support their efforts.

THE CREATIVE ECONOMY AND ENTERPRISES



RENOWNED AS A WORLD-CLASS CREATIVE CITY AND THE CULTURAL HEART OF THE REGION, NEW BEDFORD CELEBRATES ITS HISTORY AS A DIVERSE, MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY WHILE SUSTAINING AND GROWING A THRIVING CREATIVE ECONOMY ENRICHED BY A MULTITUDE OF CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC OFFERINGS.

New Bedford's connection to the arts is not incidental — it is foundational and serves as the thread that weaves through the City's larger economy. The city's historic relationship with creativity is deeply embedded into its industrial rise, maritime legacy, and richly diverse immigrant communities. In the 19th century, New Bedford nurtured the early careers of notable artists such as William Bradford, Albert Pinkham Ryder, and Albert Bierstadt, all of whom grew up in the city and went on to shape American art.

Known as the "City that Lit the World" for its whale oil exports, New Bedford's global prominence attracted not only wealth but also a community of thinkers, artists, and reformers who laid the groundwork for its enduring cultural legacy. In 1838, Frederick Douglass escaped slavery and found refuge in New Bedford — a city aligned with abolition and social progress and ultimately playing a significant role in the Underground Railroad. Just over a decade later, Herman Melville, drawing on his experiences in the city, opened *Moby-Dick* with vivid descriptions of its "patrician-like houses and opulent gardens."

While its roots in creativity run deep, New Bedford's cultural evolution did not end in the 19th century. The city has continually fostered a creative spirit and in the past two decades New Bedford has purposely built the arts and culture infrastructure that currently supports a critical mass of artists, performers, working studios, galleries and cultural institutions which has resulted in the City distinguishing itself as the cultural hub to the region with meaningful economic and workforce significance.

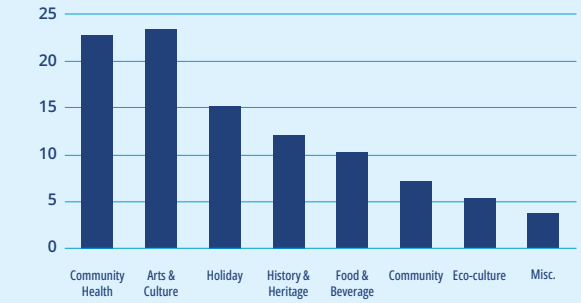
A National Leader in the Creative Economy

New Bedford has earned both state and national recognition as a leader in arts and culture. In 2011, urbanist Richard Florida named it the seventh most artistic city in America, based on the density of its artist population. That same year, the National Trust for Historic Preservation included New Bedford among its 'Dozen Distinctive Destinations' in the United States. In 2017, the Massachusetts Cultural Council awarded New Bedford the Commonwealth Award, recognizing it as the most creative community in the state for its sustained leadership, investment, and infrastructure supporting arts, culture, and the creative economy — a model for cities everywhere — a reputation further affirmed when, in 2023, Americans for the Arts awarded Mayor Mitchell the national award for public leadership in the arts.

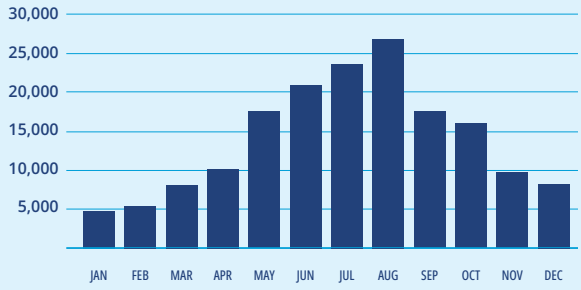
New Bedford's commitment to advancing the Creative Economy provides clear examples of how the incremental planning approach has resulted in tangible successes. In 2017, as an innovative means to support the city's cultural and artistic assets, the Mitchell Administration established Commonwealth's first-ever special revenue fund for the Promotion of Arts, Culture, and Tourism through the use of the city's hotel and meal tax. This fund enabled the development of New Bedford Creative, an initiative dedicated to arts and culture, housed within the NBEDC, and the hiring of a creative strategist, which oversaw the development of the City's first-ever strategic arts and culture plan, published in December 2018. The Creative Strategist leads a 24-member volunteer Creative Consortium, which oversees the implementation of the arts and culture plan. This strong and enduring leadership structure has proven to be a wise investment, successfully leveraging millions of dollars in grants and private sector funding to build capacity and provide direct support to creatives and cultural institutions.

The 2018 plan set the vision and the goals, and the recent work by the NBEDC's New Bedford Creative platform to advance these goals and quantify the impact of the sector is evident. The 2024 report on the economic impact of the Creative Economy cluster, demonstrates that our thriving arts and culture sector sustains over 3,300 direct jobs and nearly 600 establishments, generating an impressive $304 million in annual direct revenue.

NEW BEDFORD FESTIVALS & EVENTS - BY THEME



NEW BEDFORD WHALING NHP VISITORS - BY MONTH



In addition to their direct employment numbers, the creative sector is a draw for tourists and visitors, who stay at our hotels, visit cultural institutions, eat at local restaurants and patronize other businesses during their visit. According to visitation numbers from local attractions, New Bedford's strategy is working – visitations nearly double from 424,616 visits in 2022 to 831,980 in 2024 with a corresponding increase in hotel stays. People do not visit New Bedford merely because it is a convenient stop along I-195, but rather, people choose New Bedford as a destination because it is worth exploring.

The city's historic, architectural, and cultural development has significantly contributed to its sense of place. Moreover, this sense of place is easily translated into New Bedford's branding as an arts and culture destination, which allows the City to market these elements as a key attraction. The city has positioned itself as a cultural hub, communicating that New Bedford is a compelling destination for visitors, which supports local businesses while elevating the city's profile on a regional and national level. New Bedford was once a daytrip for visitors, however due to New Bedford's numerous historic sites, museums, galleries, ethnic restaurants, festivals, and historic architecture, overnight stays are now common.

A City of Distinct Experiences

Heritage tourism is a growing sector within the city where visitors come to experience the city's whaling legacy, immigrant heritage, Abolitionist history, and maritime culture. Heritage visitors are more likely to have extended stays and have greater expenditures. This has positive implications for the local economy--more hotel beds filled, more meals purchased, and more entry tickets bought.

New Bedford's digital and print marketing reaches over 6.5 million people in New England. The recent introduction of intercity rail service between New Bedford and Boston provides an additional opportunity for visitors to experience New Bedford's cultural attractions, festivals, ethnic restaurants and historic sites. Recent first-time rail visitors have noted the city's architecture and described their trip to New Bedford "as a glimpse of Europe, close to home ."

New Bedford is celebrated as a national leader in historic preservation.

New Bedford's strong commitment to historic preservation has been central to its recognition as a cultural leader, reinforcing the city's identity while supporting its thriving creative economy. The city is nationally recognized for integrating its rich architectural heritage into economic development, cultural expression, and community revitalization.

Across New Bedford, blocks of older, smaller buildings are quietly fueling the local economy and enhancing the character of our neighborhoods. These structures, varied in age and modest in scale, offer adaptable, affordable spaces for entrepreneurs starting new ventures and serve as welcoming locations for artist-maker spaces and independent shops and restaurants. They also provide a range of housing options that appeal to younger residents and help foster walkable, human-scaled environments where people can live, shop, and connect. These historic buildings help ground the city's identity and are invaluable to the city's vitality, providing a dense, walkable, vibrant urban environment.

New Bedford's historic buildings and cultural institutions form an unparalleled ecosystem, preserving stories of the past while fostering the creativity, education, and economic resilience of the present. Cultural institutions such as the New Bedford Whaling Museum, Zeiterion Performing Arts Center and Steeple Theatre are situated in landmark historic buildings within the downtown. The Capital and Strand Theatres located within the North End's International Marketplace are currently adapting historic buildings as community centers. All these institutions share a common denominator: leveraging federal and state historic tax credits to rehabilitate significant buildings as transformative community and economic assets.

To be both equitable and prosperous, a city needs an adequate supply of housing and housing types. The city's historic housing stock provides an opportunity to provide naturally occurring housing at lower costs. The city's abundance of tenement buildings in dense, walkable historic multi-family neighborhoods attracts renters, while the adaptive reuse of former textile mills and decommissioned schools and fire stations advances the city's preservation and sustainability goals while creating additional housing units.

Strengthening the growth and longevity of the creative economy

As mentioned above, New Bedford's identity as the regional hub of arts and culture did not happen by accident. Instead, it became what it is today through recognition of the emerging Creative Economy sector, strategic planning efforts to foster its development, and cross-sector collaboration. New Bedford Creative's recent study underscores the vital role of creative enterprises in both the city's economy and its identity as the region's cultural hub. The report also offers clear, strategic recommendations for strengthening and expanding this dynamic sector — key to sustaining New Bedford's economic competitiveness, such as:

- Track and visualize the creative economy, maintaining an inventory to monitor and market the evolution of its sector, including the knowledge, goods and services it offers.
- Establish New Bedford as the creative center of the regional blue economy, using education, branding, and other avenues to narrate our relationship with the ocean. This will support industry growth and enhance global understanding of ocean resources and coastal resilience.
- Increase and promote loan programs for the creative economy. The New Bedford Creative report highlights many small businesses and non-profits likely needing business planning and capital, which the City and NBEDC are well-positioned to address with targeted decisions.

Beyond the recent New Bedford Creative analysis, the comprehensive planning process demonstrated that New Bedford residents, business owners, policymakers, and the nonprofit community value arts and culture as an economic driver. As a city, we recognize the economic development value of cultural institutions, public art, historic character, and thoughtful design. New Bedford positions these elements of arts and culture in the forefront of this plan and integrates them into our urban philosophy because they are what makes us unique. To this end, the comprehensive plan recommends the following goals to advance arts and culture:

- **Elevate the Existing Anchors and Foster New Establishments.** The City should collaborate with its major cultural institutions to enhance their regional and national prominence while fostering the establishment of new cultural organizations that complement and expand the city's creative ecosystem.
- **Advancing the Historic District.** The Historic District, the birthplace of New Bedford, stands as one of the city's greatest cultural assets. Thanks to the visionary preservation efforts in the 1970s, its cobblestoned streets and historic architecture remain intact, later strengthened by the establishment of the New Bedford Whaling National Historic Park. While recent investment in the public realm and private development have helped revitalize the area, there is still untapped potential. The district remains underutilized as a cultural attraction, with vacant lots, incomplete waterfront connections, and an undefined brand. A dedicated strategic plan should be developed to fully unlock its potential.
- **Reimagining the Waterfront Visitor Experience.** New Bedford's waterfront is steeped in history, from its whaling legacy to its continued role as a global leader in commercial fishing. However, the physical space does not yet reflect its cultural and economic significance. Through infrastructure enhancements, strategic signage, programming, and public art, the city must elevate the waterfront as the historic and dynamic place it truly is. The upcoming infrastructure improvements on MacArthur Drive provide an opportunity for enhancements that integrate the waterfront into broader plans for the Historic District.
- **Historic Preservation Funding.** The City will continue to be innovative in seeking funding sources to protect and support its cultural assets while continuing long-held partnerships with organizations and institutions with shared goals.

    A. Since its inception in 2004, the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program has supported dozens of New Bedford projects, ranging from mill conversion housing to community centers and theatres, with nearly $50M in state tax credits, often leveraged with federal tax credits. Consistent legislative lobbying is necessary to sustain and grow this catalytic program.

    B. The City will collaborate with the Waterfront Historic Area League to develop and execute a Historic Property Redevelopment Program to assist homeowners.

- **Public Art.** Incorporating public art into municipal infrastructure and development is a powerful strategy that enriches the built environment, reflects community identity, and supports local creative economies. The City will endeavor to incorporate art into capital improvements such as waterfront redevelopment, streetscape improvements, and new public buildings to deepen the city's commitment to inclusive, place-based revitalization.
- **Access for Everyone.** Arts and culture are woven into the city's quality of life and the city will seek all opportunities to develop and adopt policies and processes to support equitable public artmaking and to ensure inclusivity for neighborhoods and cultural communities not traditionally served by the arts.
- **Maintaining the availability of the City of New Bedford's Arts, Culture, and Tourism Funds.** This consistent public funding acts as a vital foundation, enabling the city to effectively leverage significant grant and philanthropic contributions. To ensure the continued expansion and vibrancy of our arts and culture sector, actively pursuing new funding avenues alongside this dedicated tax base is essential.

By investing in these key initiatives and continuing to champion arts and culture as a cornerstone of economic growth, New Bedford will solidify its standing as a premier creative city—one where innovation, history, and artistic expression shape a vibrant and prosperous future.

Downtown New Bedford: The Region's Center



Downtown New Bedford serves as the city's cultural, economic, and historic heart. It preserves a nationally significant concentration of 19th-century architecture tied to the whaling industry, anchored by the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park. As the hub for small businesses, creative enterprises, dining, and tourism, it drives local economic activity and job creation. Its waterfront connects the city's maritime heritage to its present-day fishing and marine industries, while its public spaces, museums, and arts venues foster community identity and attract visitors from around the world.

Over the past decade, the City's economic development plans have prioritized the need to cultivate the growth and vitality of Downtown. Among other efforts, the City has invested millions in infrastructure, elevated Downtown's standard of appearance, systematized maintenance, promoted public art and entertainment, and supported its anchor institutions with direct financial support and in-kind services. Private sector investment has followed. The Downtown now has a vibrant restaurant scene, a new hotel has been added, storefront vacancies have dropped, and there is more housing construction Downtown now than in decades.

Among residents, this success has elicited both pride in the Downtown, as well as criticism that it has received favored attention over other parts of the city. A focus on the health of the urban core, however, is a standard urban development strategy because a city's downtown is not just another neighborhood. More than anywhere else, downtown is the place of common experience among residents. As the renowned urban planner Jeff Speck observed, "Downtown belongs to everybody."

Indeed, Downtown is communal space that exemplifies New Bedford's development philosophy. Therefore, continuing to invest in and grow the Downtown is a strategic imperative for the City. The City needs a clear downtown development strategy to capitalize on the recent improvements and guide the next phase of development. This plan should be in conjunction with the emerging consortium of downtown business owners, developers, and nonprofit entities, and should focus on the following priorities:

1. **Business Recruitment.** An active downtown business recruitment strategy has helped restore economic activity to cities like Greenville, SC and Riverside, CA. Sustained recruitment is how New Bedford will ensure the Downtown is diversified enough to meet challenges from macroeconomic downturns and prepared to capitalize on opportunities for new investment. A successful strategy will identify the vacant locations ready for occupancy, work with the broader business community to understand unmet needs in the Downtown in terms of services and real

estate and identify businesses that could be recruited to the downtown, such as companies that support the offshore wind industry or businesses located in the surrounding towns interested in a downtown location.

2. **Anchor Institutions & Public Sector Office Development.** Anchor institutions act as manifestations of a city's core ideals and signify the importance of the city as a regional core. Nowhere in the Greater New Bedford region is this philosophy more evident than in our Downtown, with its mix of cultural, educational, and civic anchors institutions. We must:

    A. Nurture our existing arts and culture institutions as they grow and evolve to remain attractive, modern destinations – as the Zeiterion Theatre renovation and Whaling Museum expansion demonstrate. These cultural institutions are crucial to New Bedford's rising identity as a tourist destination in itself, rather than just a stop on the way to somewhere else.

    B. Advocate for the retention and rehabilitation of civic and public sector institutions – including preserving the Hastings Keith Federal Building, actively pursuing opportunities to attract new federal and state agencies such as NOAA, and urging the Commonwealth to build a long-overdue regional justice center to replace New Bedford's aging courthouses.

    C. center to replace the city's aging courthouses, a project that is long past due.

    D. Develop a strategy to recruit new anchors, especially institutions of higher education and research, which support business activity in downtowns across America. The MassCEC's ocean energy innovation center is a recent example of a potentially important new institution and a case study in the importance of coalescing local political will and public opinion to advance new projects. And we should explore the possibility of a federal courthouse here, perhaps co-located with the new county courthouse, as Congress has established New Bedford as a possible site for a federal courthouse.

3. **Convention space.** Convention centers are important sources of jobs and spinoffs business activity in downtowns across America. New Bedford lacks convention space, even though our downtown would be an attractive place for conventions. We need to revisit our pre-pandemic studies of Greater New Bedford's convention market, which also should consider the possibility of building space to host athletic events and concerts. (Use image from Pinnacle hotel study) A recent study has demonstrated the demand for a full-service hotel with event space within the city. This study identified the city's advantageous geographic location as well as the city's cultural amenities and urban vitality as an attraction for this type of visitation which would provide a sustainable and beneficial economic impact to the city.

4. **Raising the downtown head count.** The more people there are with disposable income walking around downtown, the more vibrant it will be. We should promote the development of downtown housing – insofar as it can be supported by job growth. We can also boost jobs in the downtown by relocating government offices downtown. The city should seek to move as much of city government downtown as feasible. Similarly, hotel developers should be encouraged to site their investments in the Downtown to maximize their spinoff economic benefits.

5. **Connections to the Waterfront.** New Bedford is fortunate to have a downtown that is adjacent to the water, but only in the last few years have we sought to take advantage of that close connection. The success of the downtown will be limited if it is not knitted together with the central waterfront. To achieve this, New Bedford is committed to ensuring that the State Pier development move forward to create new commercial opportunities along the waterfront and activate the pier as a useable, intentionally designed asset. Further, we have seen some success with the conversion of Route 18 to JFK Boulevard, which transformed the limited access highway to a local boulevard from Elm Street south. However, the final phase, which will reimagine the Route 6 interchange and create new connections to the waterfront north of Downtown, remains to be done. Additionally, the City should explore more ways to improve the waterfront visitor experience such as wayfinding and interpretative signage.

6. **Downtown District Management.** Although the initial attempt by downtown businesses to establish a business improvement district was met with opposition by some downtown businesses, similar district management partnerships are common in American downtowns. They have proven themselves to be essential for downtown marketing, beautification and placemaking. Technical assistance should be sought to restart the district management discussion with Downtown property owners and businesses by recognizing and overcoming the concerns of the opposition to create a sustainable management entity for downtown marketing, beautification and placemaking.

7. **Social services.** The city's role as a regional center means that it is also a central hub for the provision of social services. However, this should not place a burden on our Downtown businesses, who have long complained about the impact of loitering and panhandling on visitation. The City and its community partners, such as the bus station and food pantries, should explore ways to collaborate, plan to relocate specific activities, and coordinate social service interventions to address chronic panhandling and loitering.

8. **Form-based zoning.** The physical development of the Downtown must be guided by the city's values. Adopting zoning rules must promote the preservation of what we cherish in our downtown but still open up opportunities for growth.

Supporting Small Business

New Bedford takes business development, regardless of scale, seriously. Too often, small businesses get left out of the discussion around economic development because they do not generate splashy headlines with huge construction projects or employment numbers, but collectively the small businesses of New Bedford support hundreds of jobs within their neighborhoods and provide neighborhood amenities that give distinction to each area of the city. New Bedford must be a place where it is easy to do business anywhere – from the waterfront to the business park and from Purchase Street to a home salon. To further this narrative, we must:

- **Continue to adapt and update our policies and programs to meet the evolving needs of the small business community.** For example, as the City promulgates zoning updates, it must consider the new post-pandemic remote work paradigm and not inadvertently "zone out" home businesses.
- **Continue to support the work of partners who deliver direct services and financial support to the small business community**—as perhaps the most tangible way to promote economic growth and job creation in our neighborhoods.
- **Document our success storie**s through well-produced profiles of grant recipient and business incubator program graduates.



- **Evaluate the efficacy of the permitting process to ensure that unnecessary bureaucratic burdens are not increasing costs for small business owners.** Complex corporate operations may require more extensive permitting, and they may also have the savvy to navigate the process, but the City must address consistent feedback from the development community regarding permitting's impact on small business development.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure serves as the fundamental backbone for economic development within any master plan. By providing essential physical systems like robust transportation networks, reliable utilities (water, power, broadband), and modern public facilities, infrastructure significantly enhances productivity and efficiency for businesses. It reduces costs, improves access to markets and labor, and attracts new investment by creating a more predictable and competitive operating environment. Furthermore, well-planned infrastructure directly supports quality of life, which in turn fosters a strong workforce and vibrant community, making a region like New Bedford more attractive for residents and businesses alike, ultimately driving sustainable, long-term economic growth.

See the discussion of infrastructure in the City Building section of this Plan.



Teamwork

The exercise of establishing a strategy and mobilizing stakeholders often is what separates successful regions from those that lag behind. The city must have a vision for its future that commands broad buy-in from stakeholders and a willingness to achieve it.

As Mayor Mitchell has frequently articulated, New Bedford's success is not merely a product of municipal initiatives, but a direct outcome of public-private partnerships. This dynamic teamwork, encompassing city government, local businesses, non-profits, and engaged community groups, allows for the pooling of resources, expertise, and innovative thinking.

New Bedford's quest over the past decade to become a leading offshore wind port is an important example. Recognizing the potential for the offshore wind industry to invest here as it did in Northern European ports, the City and the business community established a clear vision for New Bedford to reposition itself as a multipurpose port, developed a multi-faceted strategy to advance its interests, and persisted in its efforts despite political and economic headwinds. Although the effort continues today, it has been a resounding demonstration of how a city can establish a strategic direction and follow through on it can achieve major goals.

We should draw inspiration from this achievement to energize our future efforts to build a vibrant and sustainable regional economy. The city must continue to do its part. It must maintain a stable political and policy environment, convene and mobilize stakeholders around a common vision, and persist in its efforts even if the face of political adversity. It also must ensure that it has the capacity to execute. Public investment in its economic development agencies is essential to growth. It allows them to plan and refine strategy, promote and market the city's interests, and convene stakeholders. Likewise, we must ensure that the New Bedford Redevelopment Authority has the capacity to carry out its mission and is sufficiently capitalized to acquire underperforming property.

Businesses also have a role to play. Successful business understand that their self-interests extend beyond their immediate bottom line. They appreciate that in the long run their fortunes are tied inextricably to the places where they operate. They are willing to bear risks in service of the common good. Sometimes that means they need to advocate for government policies that strengthen a region's competitiveness. Sometimes it means they must speak up to hold government – or even other businesses – for failing to act consistently with broader societal interests. Sometimes they must support officials or candidates who take tough stances.

By working together, by competing to win, by holding one another mutually accountable, and by persisting in the effort, the city and its businesses community can continue to build an economy that creates opportunity for our residents.



2 Vibrant Neighborhoods

“New Bedford will continue to maintain a leadership role in the region when it comes to removing impediments to new housing.”

MAYOR MITCHELL, 2025 STATE OF THE CITY

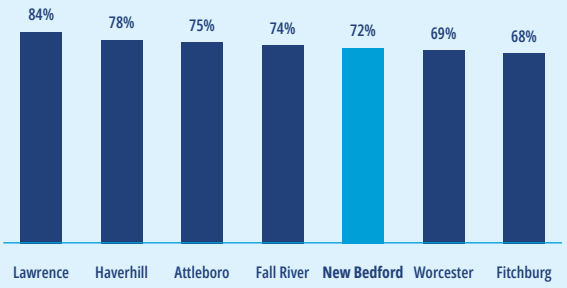
New Bedford's vibrant neighborhoods showcase a diverse array of housing, from historic Victorian and triple-decker homes to modern loft conversions and suburban-style residences. These residential areas are interwoven with supportive commercial corridors like Acushnet Avenue, bustling with local businesses and cultural amenities. Ongoing Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) initiatives are further enhancing the walkability and mixed-use character of these lively community hubs, all while supporting additional housing development to meet growing demand.

Attainable Housing

In becoming a more desirable place to live, and buoyed by economic gains, expanding port, and the arrival of inter-city rail service, New Bedford has attracted new interest and increased investment. At the same time, across the state and country, a dearth of new construction of residential units over several decades, against the backdrop of an increasing number of households, has created a housing shortage and thus increased costs.

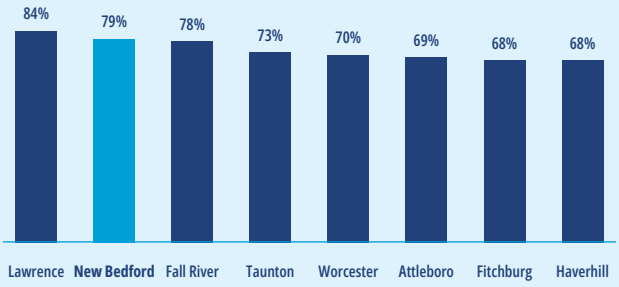
Indeed, a decade ago, apartment rentals under $1000 per month were widely available and homes were selling at half the price of what they are today. As housing costs have increased over the last decade, so has the city's population, which grew by nearly 5% to over 100,000 residents in 2020. Between 2010 and 2020, the number of households in New Bedford grew by 7.8%, but the city's housing stock increased by just 3.8%. This means 3,000 new households are vying for fewer than 1,600 new housing units. Many residents are renters, and the tight housing market restricts opportunities for households to transition into homeownership within city limits.

PERCENT OF RENTER HOUSEHOLDS FOR WHICH THE AVERAGE ASKING RENT EXCEEDS ONE-THIRD OF MONTHLY INCOME



SOURCE: MASSINC HOUSING STUDY, ZILLOW.COM, U.S. CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLDS FOR WHICH THE ESTIMATED AVERAGE MORTGAGE PAYMENT EXCEEDS ONE-THIRD OF INCOME



SOURCE: MASSINC HOUSING STUDY, ZILLOW.COM, U.S. CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

In response to the increased demand for housing, New Bedford has initiated a zoning update to address the barriers to housing development, streamlined permitting, and launched targeted interventions to unlock undeveloped and vacant properties, as called for in the 2023 housing plan "Building New Bedford". Meanwhile, the towns of Greater New Bedford and the suburbs beyond maintain antiquated zoning. Without being addressed, this regional mismatch has created an environment where New Bedford continues to house the region's poor, which in turn compounds the negative impacts of the concentration of poverty which New Bedford has worked diligently to mitigate over the last two decades, including low educational attainment, health problems, crime, neighborhood disinvestment, and environmental justice concerns.

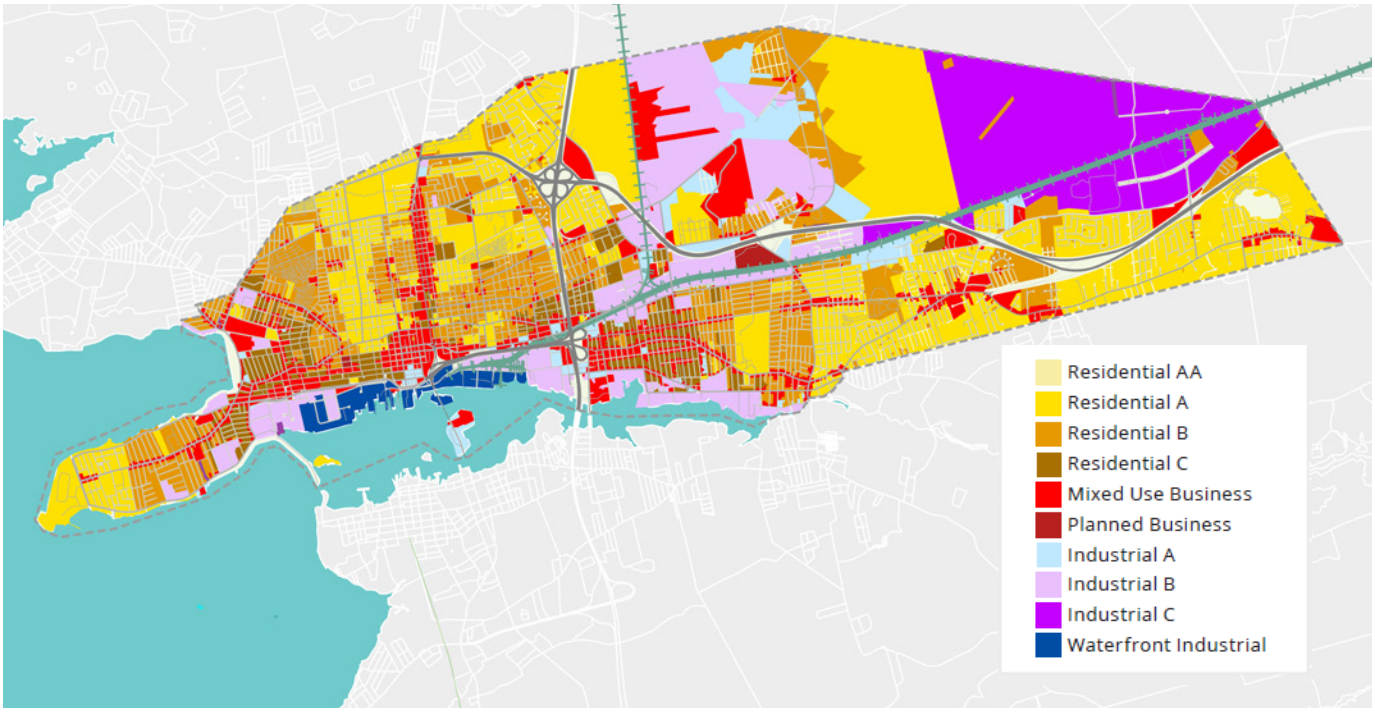
Zoning and Beyond – Land Use Policies, Production Costs, and Limited Land Restrict Supply

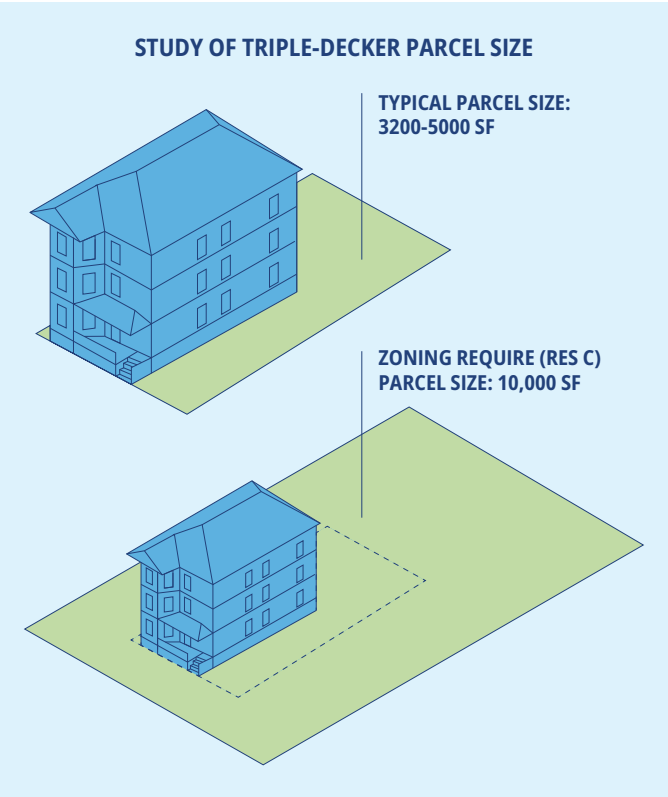
Across the country, and in many suburban areas of Massachusetts, including Greater New Bedford, restrictive zoning policies have made it nearly impossible to construct new multihousehold housing projects, instead favoring codes that only allow for the construction of single-family homes on large lots. These strategies have kept populations low and have increasingly put pressure on urban centers to construct more housing to keep up with the dispro-portionate demand. While policies like Massachusetts' MBTA Communities Act have made inroads in encouraging multihousehold construction in the suburbs, more work remains.

In New Bedford, the City is undertaking zoning reforms to modern dimensional requirements and reduce the need for additional permits for multihousehold construction. These changes will allow for the construction of what is commonly referred to as "missing middle" style housing – duplexes, triple-deckers, townhouses and courtyard apartment buildings. The modest density of missing middle neighborhoods is similar to what has existed in New Bedford historically but could not be constructed under today's existing zoning and dimensional requirements; hence the initiative underway to update the City's zoning ordinance.

However, zoning reform is not New Bedford's problem to solve on its own. Our borders are permeable, and our newer residents are likely from the region. As a recent study by MassINC confirmed, demand for housing in New Bedford is being driven by people moving from New Bedford's suburbs, Cape Cod and Northern Bristol County, where single family homes predominate. They are moving away from these places because they simply can't afford to buy a single-family home. This contributes to a regional housing ecosystem where New Bedford houses the region's poorest, leading to a concentration of poverty in the city.

While the City adjusts its uses and dimensional require-ments to align with the needs of modern development and adopts dense multifamily zoning overlays to comply with the MBTA Communities Act, the surrounding towns cannot maintain outdated zoning rules that effectively allow for only single-family homes on large tracts of land. There is a settled consensus now among economists that such inefficient use of land in suburban communities is, more than anything else, driving housing costs up across America. Housing policies in the suburbs that exacerbate income segregation are neither in the interest of the city nor the region generally, nor is it good for the people who are forced to move away from places they cannot afford to live. New Bedford's commitment to zoning reform makes it a regional leader, and as a leader, the City must be willing to provide the towns with technical expertise and other assistance, insofar as they are willing to act on it.





Moreover, city-level zoning reform will not address other obstacles to new construction. Despite the immense demand, and resultant tight rental and homebuying markets, it still remains difficult to add new housing units. The average new rental unit costs nearly $500,000 to produce, similar to the costs in Greater Boston, but New Bedford's rents, among the lowest in eastern Massachusetts, are often not sufficient for projects to make economic sense to build. Thus, only a few types of housing development tend to move forward in New Bedford: those with significant public subsidies, those who are able to achieve lower than average construction costs, or those with patient developers or investors who prioritize the location and long-term benefits over short-term financial returns.

The limited availability of buildable land restricts the number of units that can be quickly added. For example, vacant land in the far north of the city often abuts wetlands, making development costly or impossible. Additionally, when there are contiguous parcels capable of development, they are often owned by different parties, which means developers must undergo multiple real estate transactions to assemble enough land to construct at scale. In other scenarios, the redevelopment of historic properties often requires multiple rounds of tax credits, which can delay construction years after all the necessary permitting is in place.



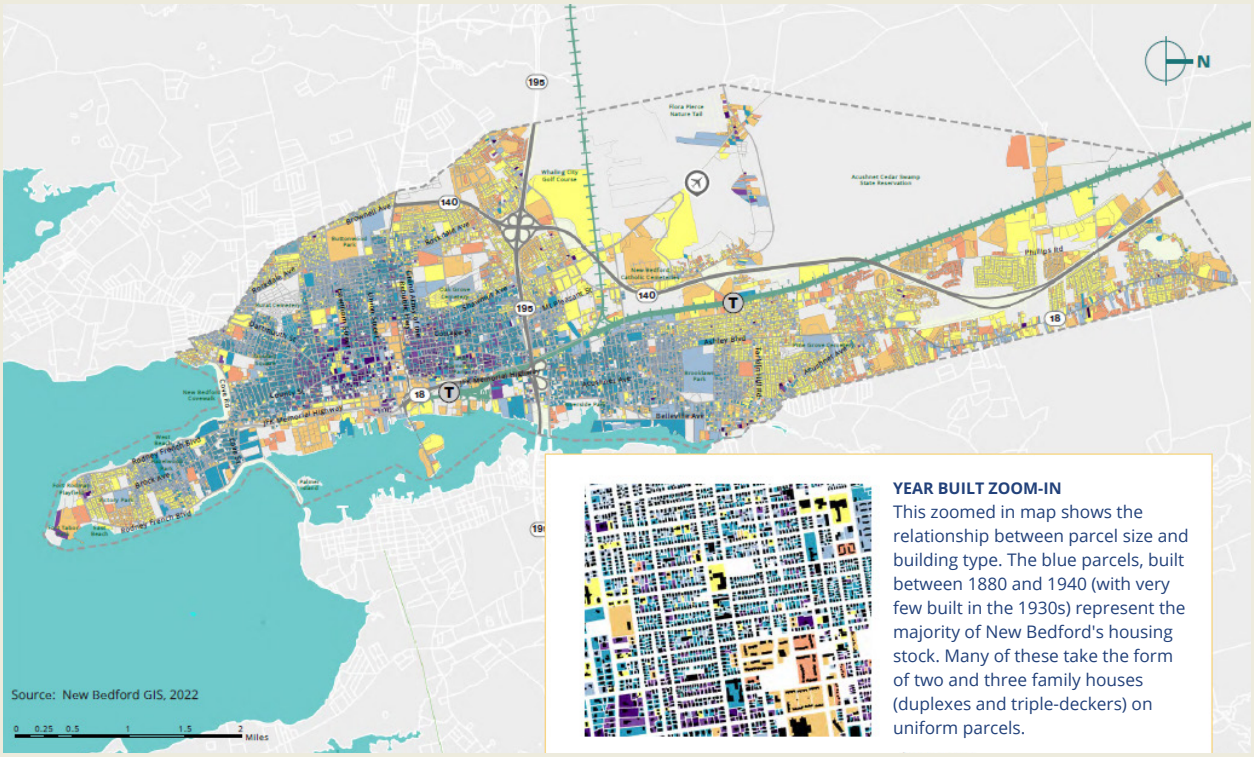
The reality of the housing development landscape in New Bedford means that many households essentially become "stuck" renting apartments when they could afford and may desire owning a home. This fact is laid bare in the city's historically low vacancy rate, which is an indicator of limited options for housing turnover. With limited supply throughout the region, aspiring homeowners, or those looking to size-up into a second home, may purchase outside of New Bedford, putting down roots in one of the surrounding towns. By not increasing the supply of new homes, New Bedford risks losing households to the suburbs and exacerbating the affordability crisis by restricting turnover in the rental market. The City has aggressively taken the approach of working with housing developers to construct new homes, condominiums, and townhouses at scale, along with the numerous multihousehold projects already underway. Adding supply of housing units of all types, at all income levels, and in all of New Bedford's neighborhoods, is crucial in creating housing opportunities for the next generation of New Bedford residents.

Current homeownership data reflects the decades-long decay of ownership opportunities in the city. Today, New Bedford demonstrates significant differences in homeownership compared to the statewide average. A greater proportion of residents are renters in New Bedford (60%) than statewide (38%). Correspondingly, homeownership is less common in New Bedford, with only 40% of residents owning their homes, compared to 62% statewide. This disparity is further reflected in the city's housing stock, which is characterized by the prevalence of multi-family structures, with single-family homes comprising only 33% of the housing units. Affordability also presents a challenge, as the median home price in New Bedford is $410,000, while the typical family can only afford a $256,000 mortgage, a difference of $154,000.

Adding to these characteristics, New Bedford's housing stock is also notable for its age. More than half (52%) of the city's homes were built before 1940, and 86% of the homes were built before 1980.

NEW BEDFORD'S HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

This map of New Bedford reveals the city's growth over time, with older buildings (darker purples and blues) clustered around the port and city center, transitioning to newer development (yellows and oranges) further out. Many of these older buildings are situated on small, uniform parcels that do not meet current zoning requirements. Upcoming zoning revisions aim to address this discrepancy, making it easier to renovate existing buildings and undertake new multihousehold development, which is a key component of the City's strategy to meet the growing demand for housing.



YEAR BUILT ZOOM-IN
This zoomed in map shows the relationship between parcel size and building type. The blue parcels, built between 1880 and 1940 (with very few built in the 1930s) represent the majority of New Bedford's housing stock. Many of these take the form of two and three family houses (duplexes and triple-deckers) on uniform parcels.

Building New Bedford: Strategies to Promote Attainable Housing for All

The City of New Bedford recently created a plan to promote attainable housing for all its residents – *Building New Bedford*. Through this plan, the City is addressing the housing challenges outlined above to ensure a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable future for all its residents. Many of the issues identified during the comprehensive planning process were previously noted in the *Building New Bedford* plan.

As *Building New Bedford* lays out, New Bedford's plan to tackle the regional housing crisis with the following strategies, which should be continued:

1. **Facilitating new housing production across all income levels.** As noted above, increasing supply is a key strategy to stem the costs of rent and homeownership and update the full portfolio of housing options that make New Bedford a vibrant central city of varied, thriving neighborhoods. Indeed, recent reports on housing such as NBEDC's *Housing for* All and the City's homelessness assessment, called for increasing the supply of housing across all income levels, as it would increase available units on the market and stabilize costs. To address this goal, the City has committed to increase funding sources, fast-track the permitting of multihousehold housing developments, recruit developers, expand the Housing Development Incentive Program, balance the need for market rate and workforce housing with the use of low-income housing subsidies, and call upon the Community Preservation Committee to spend a minimum of 20% of annual Community Preservation Act funds on community housing projects.

2. **Making use of existing housing stock and space.** To be both equitable and prosperous, a city needs an adequate supply of housing and housing types. The city's historic housing stock provides an opportunity to provide naturally occurring housing at lower costs. The city's abundance of tenement buildings in dense, walkable historic multi-family neighborhoods attracts renters, while the adaptive reuse of former textile mills and decommissioned schools and fire stations advances the city's preservation and sustainability goals while creating additional housing units. Many of the vacant residential and commercial properties across the city are stuck either in foreclosure or probate processes. Making them available to potential new owners and tenants is an effective and relatively quick means of increasing the supply of housing and comes without much of the onerous difficulty of constructing larger scale new development. To unlock these properties for occupancy and development, the Office of Housing and Community Development launched a new initiative to reactivate vacant residential properties and is coordinating with the City Council to facilitate the sale of unused city parcels for reuse as housing. Collectively, the City is also working with property owners to open up available land to single-family housing developments. This work has already yielded successes, particularly by creating an inventory of vacant properties to target for investment or enforcement. The City should continue to advance this approach of registering vacant properties, holding property owners accountable for upkeep, and incentivizing the sale of unused properties.

3. **Promoting homeownership and independent living.** Putting down roots in a neighborhood and realizing the pride of ownership contributes to a greater sense of community. Owner occupied properties tend to be better maintained and less likely than those owned by absentee landlords to pose problems. The City will continue to incentivize homeownership and owner-occupancy as a key part of its neighborhood revitalization strategy. To advance this goal, the City will increase funding for its first-time homebuyer program and increase overall funding and maximize grant amounts for its Housing Accessibility, Emergency Repair, and Financial Assistance programs.

4. **Updating the regulatory framework.** New Bedford will enact zoning changes to revise minimum lot size and other dimensional requirements, review and revise the parking minimum required for residential developments, draft a best practice ordinance clarifying and expanding the use of accessory dwelling units, review its tax lien sales process, and implement Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) districts around inter-city rail stations. As discussed earlier, the necessary zoning updates identified early in the comprehensive planning process are, at the time of writing, being presented to the City Council for adoption.

5. **Establishing a regional approach to housing issues.** As the regional center city, New Bedford will set an example for all municipalities in Greater New Bedford to address the collective housing challenges. To this end, NBEDC convened regional leaders to discuss housing challenges impact the city and the surrounding towns and to determine ways the region can work together to increase the supply of housing throughout Greater New Bedford. The City should continue to coordinate with the surrounding towns and regional partners to maintain momentum on this issue.

6. **Addressing housing instability and homelessness.** The City will use federal funding to increase its budget for rental assistance programs, undertake a review of its homeless service system and strengthen its response, align its relevant departments to enable a coordinated approach to alleviating housing challenges and reducing and eliminating homelessness, and invest in building capacity of area non-profits dedicated to solving housing challenges and ending homelessness.

Robust and Vibrant Neighborhood Commercial Districts

New Bedford's neighborhoods exemplify traditional walkable urbanism, where daily amenities and services were intentionally integrated within close proximity for residents. Neighborhood commercial districts are home to the majority of the small businesses in the city – restaurants on Acushnet Avenue, bakeries on County Street, and neighborhood markets like Giammalvo's on Purchase Street, the variety of small businesses along Kempton Street and, larger scale retail plazas on Kings Highway and Hathaway Road.

The businesses in these districts represent the entrepreneurial aspirations of New Bedford residents, and it is imperative that the City and its partners continue to support them through technical assistance, policies that incentivize small business formation, and improvements to the physical infrastructure that make it easy to drive, bike, or walk to a neighborhood business. Through these supports, the residents of the city are able to turn entrepreneurial dreams into realities and in many of the neighborhood commercial districts, this also means celebrating the unique cultures of the city or creating businesses that serve an unmet need in a particular neighborhood.

Building on Success to Support Small Businesses

In recent years, the City has made major investments to a establish a strong foundation for neighborhood businesses. Examples include improving the streetscapes on County Street and Purchase Street, pursuing the designation of Acushnet Avenue as the Transformative Development Initiative district, supporting Love the Ave's public events, creating a transit-oriented district on Purchase Street, and renovating Ashley Park and a new DeValles Elementary School in Goulart Square. Rather than starting from scratch in each neighborhood, New Bedford will keep doing what works and applying proven strategies in support of all our commercial corridors.

Based on the outcomes of the Downtown development strategy process outlined earlier, stakeholder groups should be assembled for similar strategic planning efforts in the Acushnet Avenue International Marketplace district, the County Street/Goulart Square neighborhood, and the Purchase Street/Clasky Common TOD corridor. Broadly, these groups should strategize around the following:

1. **Support existing and attract new district anchors,** such as the Capitol and Strand Theatre projects on Acushnet Avenue, and the Quest Center on Purchase Street.
2. **Identify business that could be recruited to the city and match them with an appropriate location** based on their needs and the needs of the district. This is especially important around Riverside Park, where the EPA site will soon become available for development, and in the Clasky Common TOD, where proximity to the train platform is already increasing developer interest.
3. **Inventory sites for new mixed-use development** to expand our commercial base, increase the housing supply, and develop walkable neighborhoods.
4. **Leverage the proximity of natural resources**, particularly the waterfront, by exploring opportunities to connect Acushnet Avenue to Riverside Park and Goulart Square to the Covewalk.
5. **Explore district management areas and district business associations** by educating property owners and businesses on the benefits of district management services for district marketing, beautification and placemaking.
6. **Adopt form-based zoning** to guide the physical development of our commercial districts in alignment with the city's values and promote the preservation of unique district elements we cherish.
7. **Prioritize infrastructure improvements to support business needs and development visions**, such as utility upgrades, stormwater management, street improvements, parking, and transportation projects.
8. **Designate desired uses as by-right** in the appropriate zoning district to encourage economic growth. Pair by-right uses with administrative review for objective development standards



3 City Building

“As our city continues to be built out, it will become more important to remain resolute in maintaining the standards of condition and appearance of our public spaces. Our residents deserve to live in a clean city with well-designed and visually appealing public spaces and reliable infrastructure.“

MAYOR MITCHELL, 2025 STATE OF THE CITY

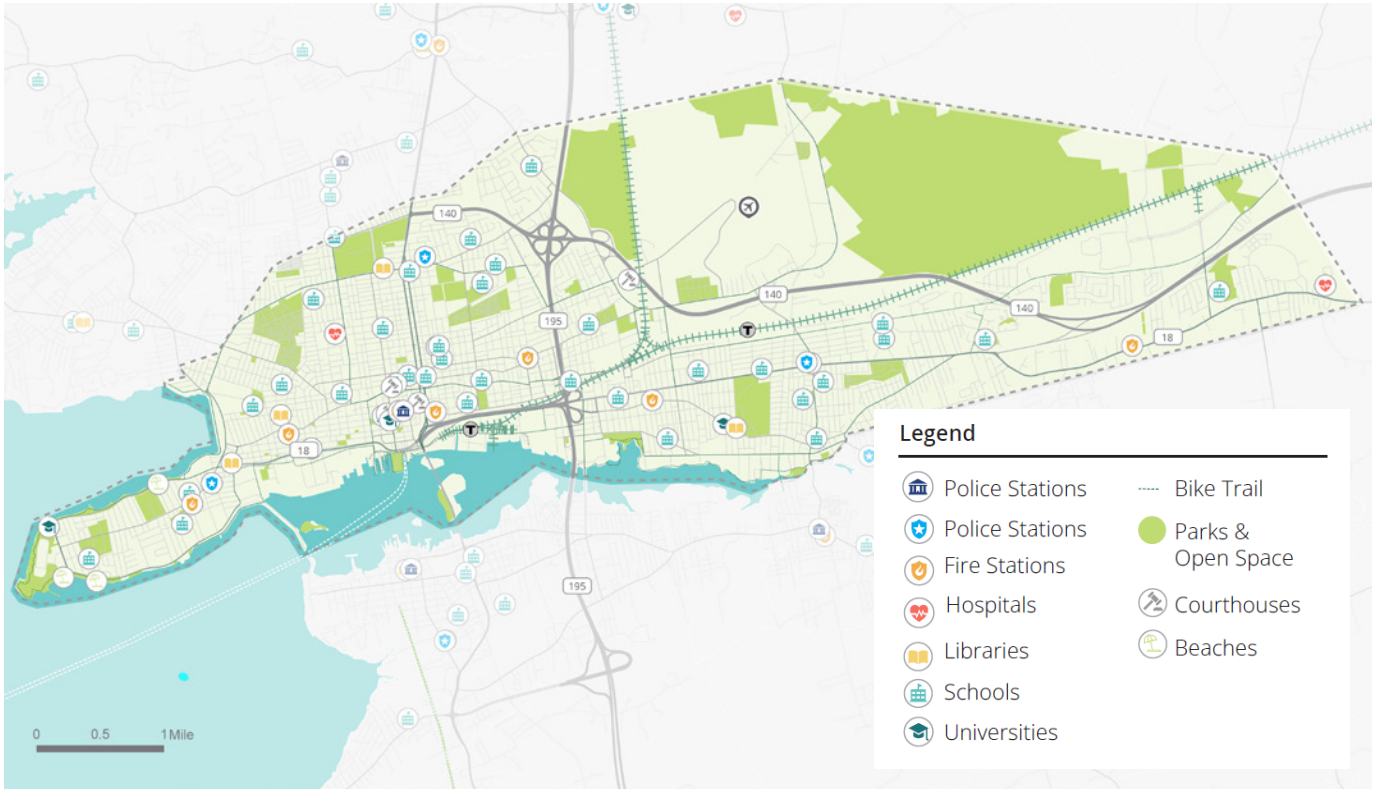
Strategic Planning & Deliberate Investments

In the decade and a half since the adoption of the previous Master Plan, the City of New Bedford has made strides in improving the quality of life for city residents and supporting the general capacity of the regional economy by improving the quality of infrastructure that is the foundation of the local economy. From reforming the public school system and creating workforce training programs, to systematically investing in streetscape improvements and from implementing major stormwater system overhauls and lead pipe replacements, to incorporating hardy, low maintenance native plants into landscape design – New Bedford is taking the steps necessary to address deferred maintenance, upgrade essential services with modern facilities, and implementing performance management data in support of sound financial decision making and planning.

The City of New Bedford assumes these efforts with the understanding that city building is a strategic and interconnected process, which involves managing multiple disciplines and tracking gradual progress in many areas simultaneously. The City considers projects and policies in relation to the broader needs of neighborhoods and the entire municipality, rather than in isolation. This interconnected perspective extends beyond the physical environment to the shared responsibility of working together toward our common goals. Recognizing how the physical environment impacts the social fabric of the city, New Bedford engages in hard work to further intangible goals. As such, each project and initiative advance and affirm the vision of New Bedford as a special city where people choose to live and raise their families, to work and grow innovative businesses, and to visit as a compelling destination that offers experiences that enrich their lives.

Effective Government: Fundamentals of a Thriving City

City services are essential to the functioning, safety, and livability of a city. They form the backbone of everyday life by ensuring access to clean water, public safety, waste collection, street maintenance, emergency response, and more. These services uphold public health, support economic stability, and enhance quality of life, from keeping neighborhoods clean and well-lit to ensuring timely responses to emergencies and maintaining public infrastructure. Effective city services also build trust between local government and residents by demonstrating accountability, responsiveness, and stewardship of shared resources.



Infrastructure

Following a surge of construction over the last decade, New Bedford is poised to continue this momentum with a strategic pipeline of projects across its port, transportation, utilities, broadband, and municipal buildings and facilities. This sustained investment reflects a clear understanding: a strong and well-maintained infrastructure is not merely a necessity, but the physical foundation upon which New Bedford's future prosperity and vibrancy will be built.

New Bedford's vision as a thriving city, a regional center, and a globally connected economic competitor is inextricably linked to a robust and modern transportation and public infrastructure network. This section outlines the critical role of these interconnected systems in realizing that vision, highlighting recent successes in addressing past neglect and strategic investments planned for the next decade.

New Bedford's internal and external connections are fundamental to its vitality. Within the city, roads, sidewalks, and dedicated bike lanes ensure local businesses thrive and residents can navigate with ease. Crucially, highway infrastructure seamlessly links New Bedford to the wider region, providing straightforward access to essential services like hospitals and courthouses, employment centers, and the recreational and cultural assets that define our area. As a regional hub, our airport and ferry terminal firmly establish New Bedford as a key gateway to the islands off Massachusetts. The reinstated intercity rail service provides a direct link between New Bedford and every community along the MBTA line to Boston, while our freight rail network positions New Bedford as a strategically advantageous location for industrial growth and development.

A key aspect of New Bedford's strategic approach to infrastructure is our proactive role as a convener and champion for vital transportation networks beyond our direct control. Recognizing our stakeholders' reliance on state and federally managed highways, the New Bedford-Fairhaven Bridge, and the State Pier, we actively engage with our state and federal partners to advocate for their maintenance and improvement. Understanding that these connections often provide the crucial first impression for visitors, the city prioritizes collaborative efforts to ensure these experiences are positive and lasting. This strategic engagement allows New Bedford to frame landmark infrastructure projects like the I-195 viaduct rehabilitation and the New Bedford-Fairhaven Bridge replacement not just as essential transportation upgrades, but also as significant opportunities to enhance civic pride, reinforce our unique identity through thoughtful design and public art, and project an image of a city that values both functionality and aesthetics in partnership with our state and federal counterparts.

The city's strategic and interconnected planning, evident in landmark infrastructure projects, also informs the design of its everyday streets and sidewalks. These are intentionally developed to enhance quality of life by ensuring access to schools, supporting the workforce through multimodal connections to jobs and housing, and bolstering the regional economy.

Having useful and reliable hard infrastructure available to businesses is also essential to economic vitality. In the past ten years, New Bedford has successfully facilitated a boom of infrastructure construction. The Port of New Bedford is in the midst of a pipeline of $1.2 billion in pier construction and upgrades, harbor clean up, berth dredging and upgrades to supporting surface transportation. This new infrastructure will enhance the competitiveness of our fishing, offshore wind, cargo and marine construction industries, and generally support our growing maritime economy. The pipeline has included major surface transportation projects, including the reestablishment of passenger rail service between New Bedford and Boston, major freight rail upgrades, the reconstruction of the I-195 viaduct, the replacement of the New Bedford-Fairhaven Bridge, the reconstruction of JFK Boulevard, the construction of the CoveWalk and HarborWalk, and numerous street upgrades. Both of the airport's runways have been reconstructed, hundreds of millions of dollars worth of upgrades to our water and wastewater systems have been completed, and we have built and renovated new public safety and school buildings.

We have been successful in building infrastructure because we have thoughtfully analyzed the city's long-term needs, committed resources to planning, and advocated effectively for state and federal funding. Most importantly, we have actively moved projects forward instead of deferring necessary renovations or replacements to a later date. The City implemented a formal Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) in 2014 to prioritize and fund major infrastructure and facility improvements. The 2014 launch marked the beginning of a rolling fiveyear plan designed to strengthen fiscal management, coordinate long-term investments, and support the city's stable AA credit rating.

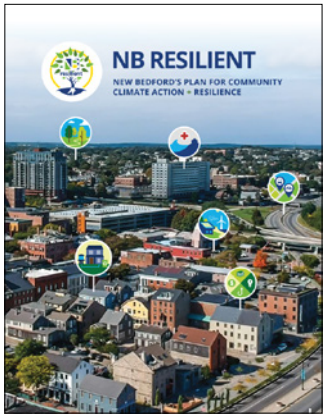


Each city department responsible for infrastructure or public facilities now actively manages a cycle of assessment, planning, funding, and construction. We must maintain our focus on this process. We are now well-positioned to move forward with another extensive set of projects in the next ten years:

- The forthcoming port strategic plan will outline various crucial projects, including the reconstruction of Homer's Wharf and Pope's Island Marina, the strategic development of the State Pier, and the necessary dredging of the federal channel to enhance maritime infrastructure and economic activity.
- Dedicated city street upgrades are essential to address years of deferred maintenance and ensure a safe and reliable transportation network for all residents and businesses. Strategic rebuilding of major segments of County Street, MacArthur Boulevard, and Purchase Street will modernize critical transportation corridors and improve infrastructure resilience.
- Ongoing water infrastructure projects, including the critical replacement of remaining lead service lines, and necessary wastewater upgrades as outlined in the City's long-term control plan, require continued focus.
- The establishment of ubiquitous fiber optic broadband service will create a foundational infrastructure for economic growth, educational advancement, and enhanced quality of life throughout the city.
- The construction of the new Congdon-DeValles and Ashley-Swift Schools, alongside planned facilities upgrades outlined in the School Department's capital plan, represents significant investments in our educational infrastructure.
- Investing in public safety, the city is undertaking the construction of a new police headquarters and the replacement of at least one fire station to modernize essential emergency services.
- Strategic construction of new parking garages on Purchase Street and MacArthur Boulevard will enhance accessibility and support economic activity in those areas.
- Enhancing waterfront access and recreation, the city is undertaking the construction of the RiverWalk and recreational boating piers in the upper harbor, while also exploring the feasibility and development of a long-term plan for the raising of the Coggeshall and Interstate 195 harbor bridges.
- Recognizing the regional airport as vital transportation infrastructure and a growing business hub, the city and business community should actively support planned upgrades, including the replacement of the terminal and control tower, the establishment of a new entrance off Mt. Pleasant Street, and efforts to secure permanent commercial air service, as a thriving airport significantly enhances the regional economy's competitiveness.

Resilience

New Bedford's Climate Action and Resilience Plan and Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Plan are essential, forward-looking planning tools that guide the city in adapting to climate change while protecting its people, infrastructure, and natural resources. The Plan, titled as NB Resilient, adopted in 2020, outlines strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve energy efficiency, expand renewable energy use, and promote sustainable transportation and land use. It also addresses environmental justice by prioritizing vulnerable communities most at risk from climate impacts such as flooding, extreme heat, and rising sea levels. Complementing this, the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan identifies the city's most pressing climate-related vulnerabilities through a community-driven process. It highlights critical infrastructure, social systems, and environmental assets that need to be strengthened or adapted to withstand future climate stressors. Together, these plans provide a coordinated roadmap for building long-term resilience, guiding investments in green infrastructure, emergency preparedness, and equitable climate adaptation. Their importance lies not only in risk reduction, but also in enabling New Bedford to access state and federal funding, foster community engagement, and position itself as a regional leader in sustainable, climate-smart planning.



Recognizing the importance of protecting the Port as a critical economic asset, the City of New Bedford and the Town of Fairhaven have worked collaboratively to address the vulnerability and resilience of port infrastructure. Through the NB Resilient initiative and in partnership with the Town of Fairhaven, the municipalities have developed a Maritime Business Resilience Toolkit, a practical guide designed to help port-related businesses strengthen their operations against sea level rise and other climate-related risks. In addition, a set of Resilient Design Guidelines was created to support city and town planners, developers, businesses, and residents seeking to safeguard their infrastructure through climate-smart planning and design practices.

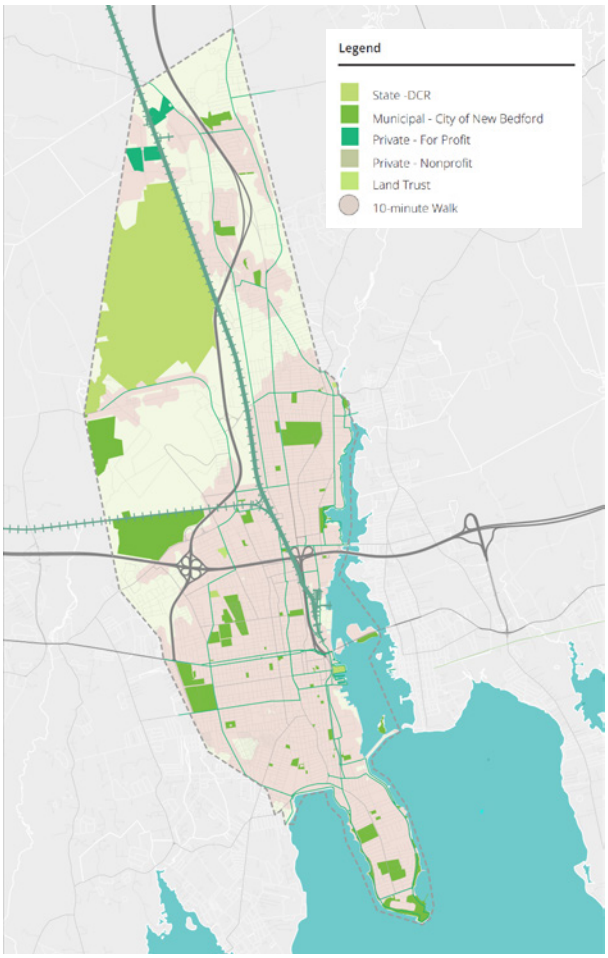
Public Spaces

As New Bedford continues to grow, maintaining high standards for the condition and appearance of public spaces becomes increasingly important. Our residents deserve a clean, attractive city with well-designed spaces and reliable infrastructure. Last year, the City introduced the Standard of Appearance for the Public Realm, which now serves as a guiding framework for keeping New Bedford looking its best.

Streets are the public spaces people experience most often. For years, they were neglected, with little investment in maintenance. New Bedford now prioritizes street improvements as a core part of its public space strategy with increased spending.

New Bedford has made significant, sustained investments in its outdoor recreational assets, recognizing their essential role in enhancing quality of life, promoting public health, and supporting environmental resilience. Guided by a long-term commitment to equity and access, the City has prioritized improvements to parks, waterfronts, trails, and green infrastructure across all neighborhoods.

Over the past decade, the City has revitalized major parks, including Buttonwood Park, Brooklawn Park, and Ashley Park, through capital improvements such as athletic field



upgrades, playground replacements, stormwater infrastructure, and expanded community gathering spaces. Notably, the City constructed its first regulation-size soccer field at Dias Field and completed a full reconstruction of the historic West Beach Bathhouse, restoring a key coastal amenity.

New Bedford has also embraced the importance of integrating outdoor public recreation with its coastal geography. Continued investment to the City's Blue Lane, a waterfront multi-use pathway network spanning approximately 11 miles. This pathway includes the HarborWalk and CoveWalk, elevated trails along the hurricane barrier, and will connect to the planned RiverWalk.

The RiverWalk is a key component of New Bedford's investment in recreation, environmental restoration, and climate resiliency. Running along the west bank of the Acushnet River, this multi-use path will connect the North End to the city's broader Blue Lane network, offering new public access to the waterfront. Designed with habitat restoration, storm surge projections, and long-term environmental health in mind, the Riverwalk will complement ongoing Superfund cleanup efforts while creating a safe, scenic space for walking, biking, and nature observation. As a phased, infrastructure-integrated project, it reflects the City's commitment to equitable recreation, shoreline revitalization, and climate-adaptive design.

Recognizing the value of green infrastructure, the City has planted more than 5,000 new street trees over the past decade, recognizing trees as essential infrastructure that improves neighborhood life by cooling homes, calming traffic, cleaning the air, and increasing property values. A citywide tree inventory has been completed, and a comprehensive maintenance plan, complete with an interactive map covering all 12,000 street trees, will soon be available on the City's website.

A city that looks good shows it cares. While the City plays a lead role in maintaining shared spaces, residents can help too. To make it easier, the City has launched a new app, NBConnected, which allows residents to report issues, pay bills, apply for permits, and more, from the convenience of their phones. In-person services will still be available, but many will now be accessible at your fingertips.

Schools

Facing significant challenges at the time of the last comprehensive plan the New Bedford Public Schools (NBPS) was placed under state monitoring in 2011. The Mitchell Administration arrived the next year and brought in new leadership to drive comprehensive reform. The district embraced data-driven decision-making, enhanced leadership capacity at the central office and individual school levels, and implemented targeted support for English Language Learners and students with special education needs, alongside a high school redesign. These efforts yielded substantial improvements in student outcomes, notably increased graduation rates, leading to the district's release from state monitoring in July 2017.

Having made significant programmatic progress, the school department continues to implement a strategic plan that prioritizes high-quality instruction, student support, organizational excellence, and public confidence. An updated plan is expected within the next year. Even with the monumental gains made since 2012, we recognize that any large school district will never be without its challenges. The full impact of the pandemic on students are still being understood. As school officials address myriad outcomes related to physical health, mental wellbeing, and chronic absenteeism, the City must give them the modern tools necessary to continue to make innovative changes in the delivery of public education, and school facilities are the most tangible and foundational component of this concept.

Moving beyond programmatic improvement, the district has strategically focused on renovating its outdated facilities to create learning environments that reflect the dynamic 21st-century education taking place within their walls. New Bedford's school buildings are seeing the most significant improvements in over 50 years, thanks to a strategic decision to invest federal relief funds in facility upgrades and the district's enhanced ability to manage capital projects. Nearly every school over 20 years old has undergone or is scheduled for major renovations, ranging from essential internal updates like heating systems to visible enhancements like new playgrounds and athletic fields. Upcoming projects include a new Congdon-Devalles elementary school, a central kitchen, a school-based health center, and planning for a North End school to replace Ashley and Swift. The city's two major high schools are also thriving. At New Bedford Voc-Tech, test scores and facilities have improved alongside national recognition in robotics. Meanwhile, New Bedford High School is seeing growing success in college admissions, Advanced Placement performance, and advanced course participation, collectively demonstrating a strong and rising commitment to academic excellence.

Public Safety

The City has prioritized comprehensive investments in public safety, focusing on staffing, infrastructure, modernization, and accountability. The police force continues to grow, supported by sign-on bonuses, hiring incentives, and improved compensation. Plans are also underway for a new police headquarters, the city's first in over 100 years, to support long-term recruitment and professional standards.

Through a coordinated strategy spanning equipment modernization, infrastructure upgrades, proactive code enforcement, educational initiatives, and smart funding practices, the City has reinforced the Fire Department's ability to protect its citizens. Fiscal Year 2025 marked a historic investment with the addition of four new fire apparatuses, the most ever acquired in a single year. Enhanced fire prevention efforts and expanded community outreach have also contributed to a noticeable reduction in fire incidents citywide.

Data Management

New Bedford has embraced a data-driven approach to municipal government, embedding performance metrics and analytics into nearly every aspect of city operations. The city's first comprehensive Data Strategy has recently been developed in partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies and Johns Hopkins University. This initiative, led by New Bedford's newly appointed Director of Data Management, aims to standardize data collection across departments, enhance transparency, and improve decision-making through actionable insights. The city has implemented a performance management framework that requires each department to set measurable goals and regularly report on outcomes, strengthening accountability and operational efficiency. This type of digital modernization, including tools like NB Connected, a 311 mobile app that connects residents to city services, reflects a commitment to building a smart, responsive, and accountable city government.

VISIONARY PLANNING ACROSS ALL MUNICIPAL SECTORS

Across departments and agencies, New Bedford does more planning than perhaps any other city in New England. This Comprehensive Plan builds on ongoing and complementary planning exercises undertaken by various City entities. These include:

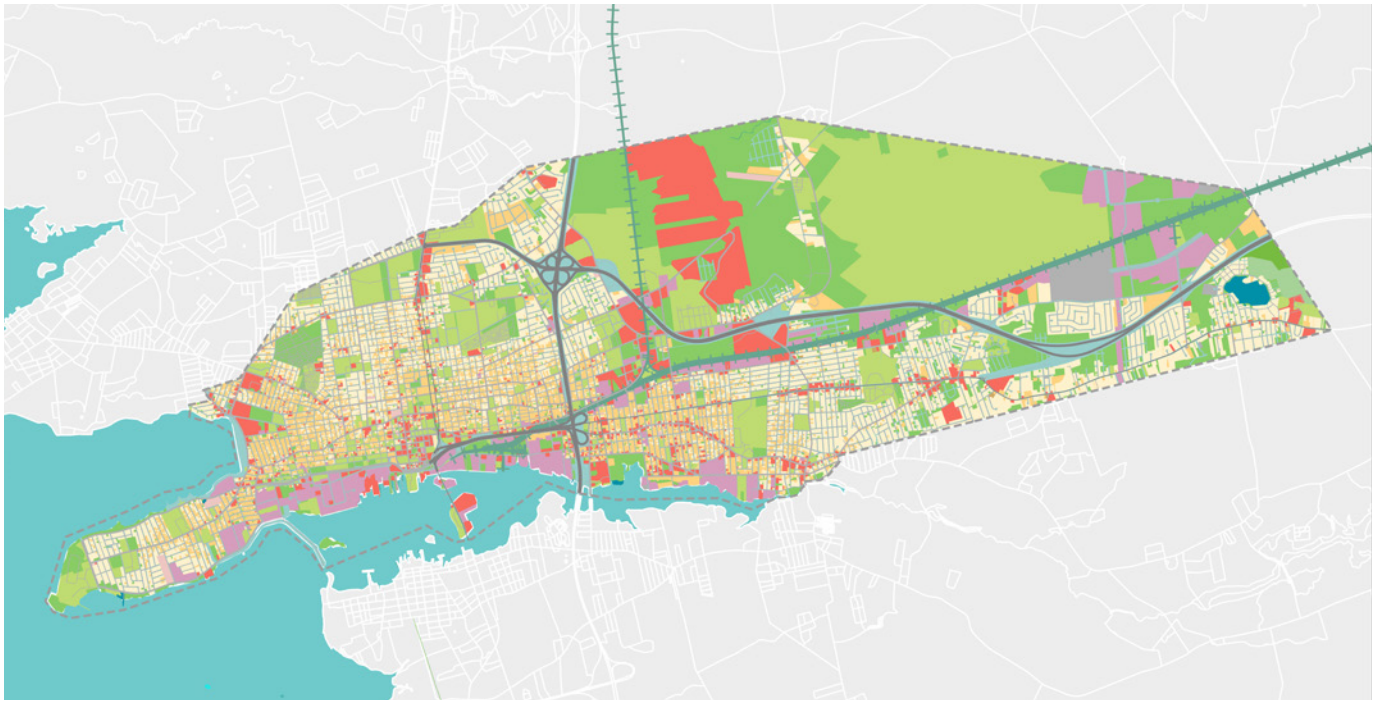
1. The assessment of the **Police Department** prepared by Jensen & Hughes outlines a strategy for improvement to ensure standards of modern policing are being followed by the department.
2. Under the leadership of the new Chief, the **Fire Department** will be undertaking a strategic planning process in the coming year.
3. The **Health Department** recently completed its 2025-2028 Community Health Improvement Plan and is engaging in a strategic planning process in pursuit Public Health Accreditation Board accreditation.
4. In 2023, the **New Bedford Free Public Library** debuted a FY24-FY28 Strategic Plan to improve access and programming to meet the needs of residents.
5. Currently, the City, **the Port Authority**, and the Town of Fairhaven are working on an update to the Municipal Harbor Plan, which will provide a framework for meeting the needs of harbor users and optimizing land use around the harbor.
6. The **Department of Public Infrastructure** is responsible for devising and implementing a variety of plans. The 20-year Integrated Plan assess all of the City's Clean Water Act responsibilities and prioritizes projects to meet the mandate. The ADA Transition Plan details improvement projects that will help bring the city into ADA compliance in an efficient and fiscally responsible manner. The Green Infrastructure Master Strategy identifies opportunities for green infrastructure installation and sets priorities for implementation. Finally, DPI is the authority for compliance with the City's stormwater management regulations.
7. The **Department of Facilities and Fleet Management** oversees the implementation of the City's Capital Improvement Program, which prioritizes renovation and replacement of City-owned properties.
8. In order to improve data collection and usage and operational transparency, the City's **Office of Data Management** will be completing a Citywide Data Strategy to be implemented in 2025-2027.
9. **New Bedford Public Schools** recently reached the end of their 2020 Strategic Plan and is in the process of developing a new plan.
10. **Parks, Beaches and Recreation** is responsible for compiling and implementing the 2021-2028 Open Space and Recreation Plan, which outlines a strategy for improving access to recreational and cultural assets for all.
11. The **Department of Environmental Stewardship** maintains a comprehensive dashboard tracking the progress on the NB Resilient Plan, which is a roadmap for preparing for and being resilient to the environmental changes we are experiencing.

Progress on these plans are tracked using the specific metrics determined by each department. The City coordinates internally to ensure that departments share regular updates on their plans to identify areas for collaboration and information sharing.



4 Land Use Framework

A city's land use pattern is the physical arrangement and intensity of residential, commercial, industrial and institutional development, and how this development integrates with open land, natural resources, and roadways. A "Land Use Framework" expands upon the current land use pattern by envisioning how our city will grow. As with all planning processes, a land use framework is iterative, and the version presented in this Plan updates the vision from the previous Master Plan to modernize the strategy and reexamine focus areas.



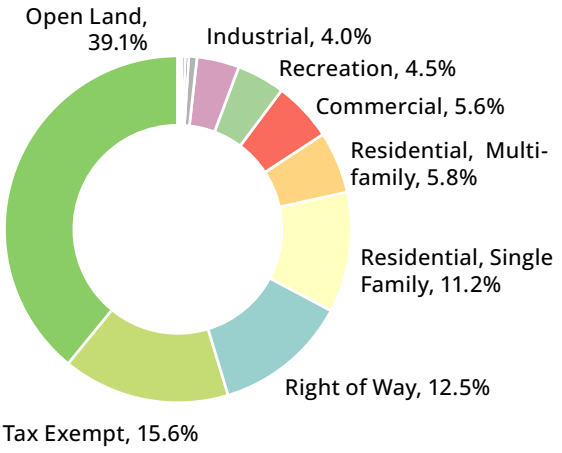
New Bedford's land use pattern has always reflected its coastal location with growth radiating outwards from the port and the waves of industrial expansion dependent on water access to drive manufacturing, land catches, and transport goods. Examining the land use demonstrates how New Bedford evolved physically over the last two centuries, but also how it solidified its identity as thriving urban port and regional center.

The Land Use Framework is intended to inform future policy decisions, such as updates to the City's zoning ordinance, which regulates the physical growth of the city and determines what types of new development are allowed and where. New Bedford has a unique sense of place with a diversity of neighborhoods and commercial corridors. Retaining area characteristics while accommodating growth requires a nuanced and site-specific approach to development.

Later in this chapter, Land Use Area Studies illustrate potential land use activities, opportunities for development, and supportive zoning in selective areas of the City.

A comprehensive plan serves as the City's roadmap for future land use development. The City Zoning Ordinance is the primary policy mechanism to implement that vision. Section 81D of the Massachusetts General Laws, the enabling legislation for comprehensive plans, notes that the plan is the "basis for decision making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality." Once this Comprehensive Plan is approved, the city will need to revise its zoning to align with the recommendations contained here. Additional focused neighborhood area plans will be needed to further refine zoning during the duration of this plan's implementation.

Making up a large portion of New Bedford's Open Land, the majority of the upper-central part of New Bedford is comprised of the Acushnet Cedar Swamp State Reservation, a large wetland area owned by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation.



Source: MassGIS Land Cover/Land Use Data

LAND USE TODAY

Key Patterns

New Bedford's identity is deeply rooted in its connection to the port—a relationship that has profoundly shaped the city's land use patterns over time. From the earliest days, development radiated outward from the waterfront, reflecting the city's enduring ties to the sea. In the mid-1700s, Joseph Rotch left Nantucket and established whale fishery operations along New Bedford's deep harbor, transforming a small village into a thriving maritime hub centered around the port and downtown.

A century later, the rise of the textile industry fueled rapid population growth, the formation of diverse ethnic neighborhoods, and the city's expansion to the north and south. In the last hundred years, the emergence of commercial fishing and seafood processing further cemented New Bedford's national prominence as a center of global maritime commerce, anchored, as always, to the sea.

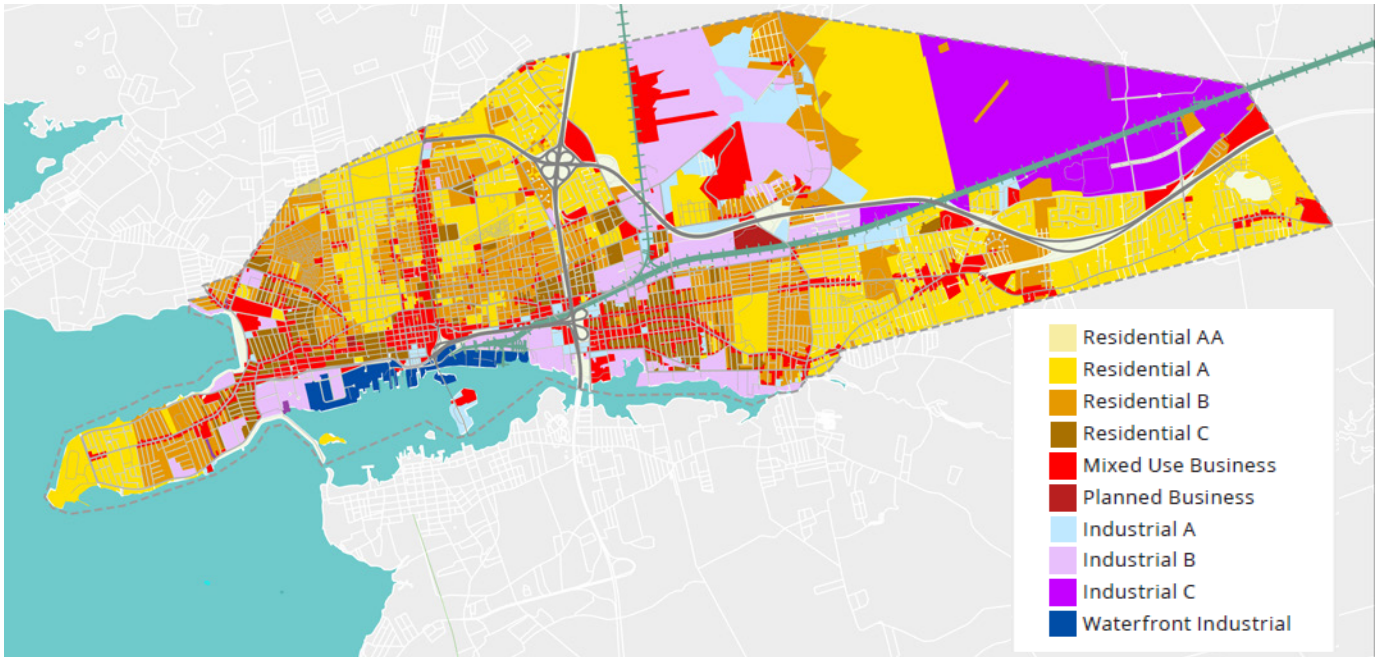
Decades of planning and investment in the Port and Downtown New Bedford have resulted in a strong city center. Today's bustling harbor filled with commercial fishing fleet, commercial offshore wind barges, and waterborne transportation sits proximate to an active downtown filled with civic life, commercial and cultural destinations.

Beyond the center, New Bedford is composed of varied places which shape the physical and social infrastructure of the city. Beloved and varied neighborhoods stretch north, south, and west and large public parks, open space, and natural resources are accessible and dispersed throughout. Recognizing these areas and their patterns of development is an important foundational step to prioritize their future.

Land Use Allocation

The chart below details the current land classification in New Bedford, revealing that a substantial two-thirds of the city's land area is non-taxable. This non-taxable land encompasses three main categories. First, Tax Exempt Land includes properties owned by governmental, educational, or religious organizations. Second, Open Land primarily consists of the vast Acushnet Cedar Swamp. Finally, Right of Way accounts for the network of streets, roads, and highways that are essential for connecting various parts of New Bedford. This distribution highlights the significant portion of land within the city that is dedicated to public use, conservation, and infrastructure.

While New Bedford is making progress with the Advanced Manufacturing Campus at the municipal golf course, and occasional housing conversions of former schools occur, large-scale conversion of non-taxable land is uncommon and unlikely to significantly alter the current land classification percentages. Consequently, the real estate tax burden predominantly rests on owners of the remaining one-third of New Bedford's developable land, a majority of whom are residential property owners. Implementing land use policies that enhance the value of commercial and industrial land offers a long-term strategy to gradually shift the property tax burden away from homeowners.



Land Use – Future Vision

The future land use vision imagines a thriving New Bedford with a diverse strong and vital downtown, centers of economic production, connected commercial corridors, self-sufficient neighborhood centers, distinct city gateways, and blue-green open spaces, all linked together by residential neighborhoods offering a range of housing choices.

As the City continues to modernize its zoning regulations and land use policies, these initiatives should prioritize the protection of established neighborhoods, actively support the growth of emerging economic sectors, and require the implementation of sustainable design standards in all new development and redevelopment projects.

LAND USE TYPES

Downtown

Centers provide a distinct sense of place and variety of experiences. Downtown is the urban core of regional. Like many mid-sized cities, Downtown New Bedford has undergone significant change in response to shifting real estate trends and consumer behavior. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the decline of traditional office and commercial uses, while the continued growth of online retail has diminished foot traffic. These trends have resulted in a number of underutilized properties, including expansive surface parking lots that present opportunities for strategic infill and mixed-use redevelopment. To remain a vibrant, inclusive, and economically resilient urban core, Downtown must evolve to reflect current needs by strengthening its connections to nearby neighborhoods and the adjacent waterfront, and particularly by increasing housing density near amenities and enhancing its role as a regional hub.

Commercial Corridors

Commercial corridors both serve nearby neighborhoods and have unique aspects that make them dynamic destinations in their own right. They are home to job centers, restaurants, retail, residential and community institutions. Unlike centers, which are amassed in a cluster of blocks, corridors often span many blocks in a single path. There is a variety of corridor densities in New Bedford with some being more pedestrian oriented with ground floor relationships with the public realm, while other corridors are more autocentric.

Further investing and supporting transit options, mixed-use development, management planning and enhanced streetscape amenities in commercial corridors will improve the quality of life for residents and build on New Bedford reputation as a cultural destination and economic center for the region.

Residential Neighborhoods

Neighborhood hubs provide services and activities directly related to the neighborhood in which they are situated. Corner markets, bodegas, barber shops, restaurants, schools, houses of worship, and community centers all exist in these locations, serving as community anchors where people work, live, connect and socialize. These hubs often have distinct characteristics often related to the timeframe in which they were historically developed and are dynamic cultural destinations for both residents and visitors. The neighborhood hubs have the potential for supporting a greater diversity of small-scale businesses and infill development to meet housing needs. It will be critical to retain the unique character of these centers and guard against unintended displacement.

New Bedford boasts a diverse array of residential neighborhoods that form the foundation of the city. Many mid- to high-density mixed-use areas feature a blend of apartment buildings with ground-floor retail, traditional tenement-style housing, and smaller-scale multi-family units. These compact, walkable neighborhoods are typically anchored by commercial corridors or neighborhood centers and are supported by community assets such as parks, schools, community centers, and places of worship. The development pattern is distinguished by minimal setbacks, active streetscapes, and a strong sense of place, reflecting a historic urban fabric well-suited for sustainable growth.

While these mid-to high-density residential areas are vibrant and active, they would benefit from targeted urban design and infrastructure improvements, including enhanced pedestrian lighting, expanded tree canopy, traffic calming measures, and sidewalk upgrades—to create safer streets, activate building edges, increase walkability, and support greater transit use. These investments are essential to strengthening neighborhood livability and improving the overall quality of life for residents.

Neighborhoods in the far North and West Ends of the city, as well as the South End peninsula, are primarily characterized by low-density, suburban-style single-family residential development. These areas feature larger lot sizes and limited access to retail, services, and social services, and are generally located along the city's outer edges. To support more walkable, connected neighborhoods targeted investments in transportation infrastructure, thoughtful integration of 'missing middle' housing types, and complementary commercial uses that respond to local context while enhancing access to daily amenities will be necessary.

Open Space/Recreation

New Bedford has a comprehensive system of open space and recreation lands. These spaces total nearly 1,700 acres and include 6 major parks, 15 neighborhood parks, more than 12 miles of trails and bikeways, 9 miles of waterfront, 26 acres of beaches, and numerous public and private baseball, basketball, softball, soccer fields, and playgrounds. Places like the Olmstead designed Buttonwood Park, which is also home to a renowned zoo, and Fort Rodman Park, located on the site of a Revolutionary War era coastal defense fort offer amenities that are essential to residents' quality of life.

The preservation and ongoing maintenance of New Bedford's open spaces are vital to both community well-being and environmental resilience. Expanding cultural and recreation-oriented programming can deepen connections between residents, visitors, and these public assets. The City's efforts to integrate public art into open spaces should be strengthened and expanded. Supporting 'Friends of' groups and establishing consistent, sustainable maintenance plans will help ensure these spaces remain publicly accessible, well-cared for, and valued by future generations while enriching the overall visitor experience.

Gateways

Gateways in New Bedford are entrance points such as key streets and transit hubs. Recognizing the importance of creating a welcoming environment for residents, visitors, and workers, New Bedford's gateways serve as vital first impressions. Enhancing these 'front doors' through targeted improvements in high-visibility areas presents an opportunity to celebrate the city's rich history and cultural identity. Each gateway should be designed to reflect the unique character of the surrounding neighborhoods and districts, creating visually appealing and inviting entrances that foster a strong sense of place.

Economic Production Areas

Economic production areas such as the waterfront, Business Park, and Advanced Manufacturing Campus are a critical component of the city's economy, providing employment opportunities and supporting sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, marine trades, and clean energy. In an urban setting like New Bedford, industrial activities must be thoughtfully and strategically integrated to ensure compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods and other land uses. This includes concentrating heavier industrial operations in well-buffered zones with established infrastructure.

Light industrial uses, such as small-scale manufacturing, fabrication, food production, and maker spaces, play a vital role in supporting a diversified urban economy. Strategic siting near commercial corridors, innovation districts, and underutilized industrial parcels allows for synergy with emerging sectors such as the blue economy, clean energy, and the creative economy. To ensure compatibility, design standards should address noise, loading, and environmental impacts, while encouraging adaptive reuse of existing buildings and high-quality architectural treatment to integrate with the urban fabric.

Transit Oriented Development Districts

With the arrival of inter-city rail, New Bedford seized the opportunity to plan and establish Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) districts that promote higher-density, mixed-use development within walking distance of the City's two transit stations. The Kings Highway TOD Overlay District in the North End and the Clasky Common TOD Overlay District near Downtown retain the existing industrial oriented land uses but provide the opportunity to serve as key anchors for compact, mixed-use development, including housing and businesses that reduce the need for cars and make it easier to walk, bike and access services conveniently.

The establishment of these Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) districts can serve not only as catalytic anchors for new development, but also as vital connectors between neighborhoods and nearby employment centers. Community-driven planning efforts have informed the creation of design guidelines aimed at preserving neighborhood character while guiding future growth. To support implementation, the City has actively pursued and secured federal and state grant funding to plan and construct essential supporting infrastructure, including structured parking, roadway and streetscape upgrades, and utility improvements. These coordinated investments will help ensure that the TOD districts are both functional and equitable, reinforcing local identity while advancing broader mobility and economic development goals.

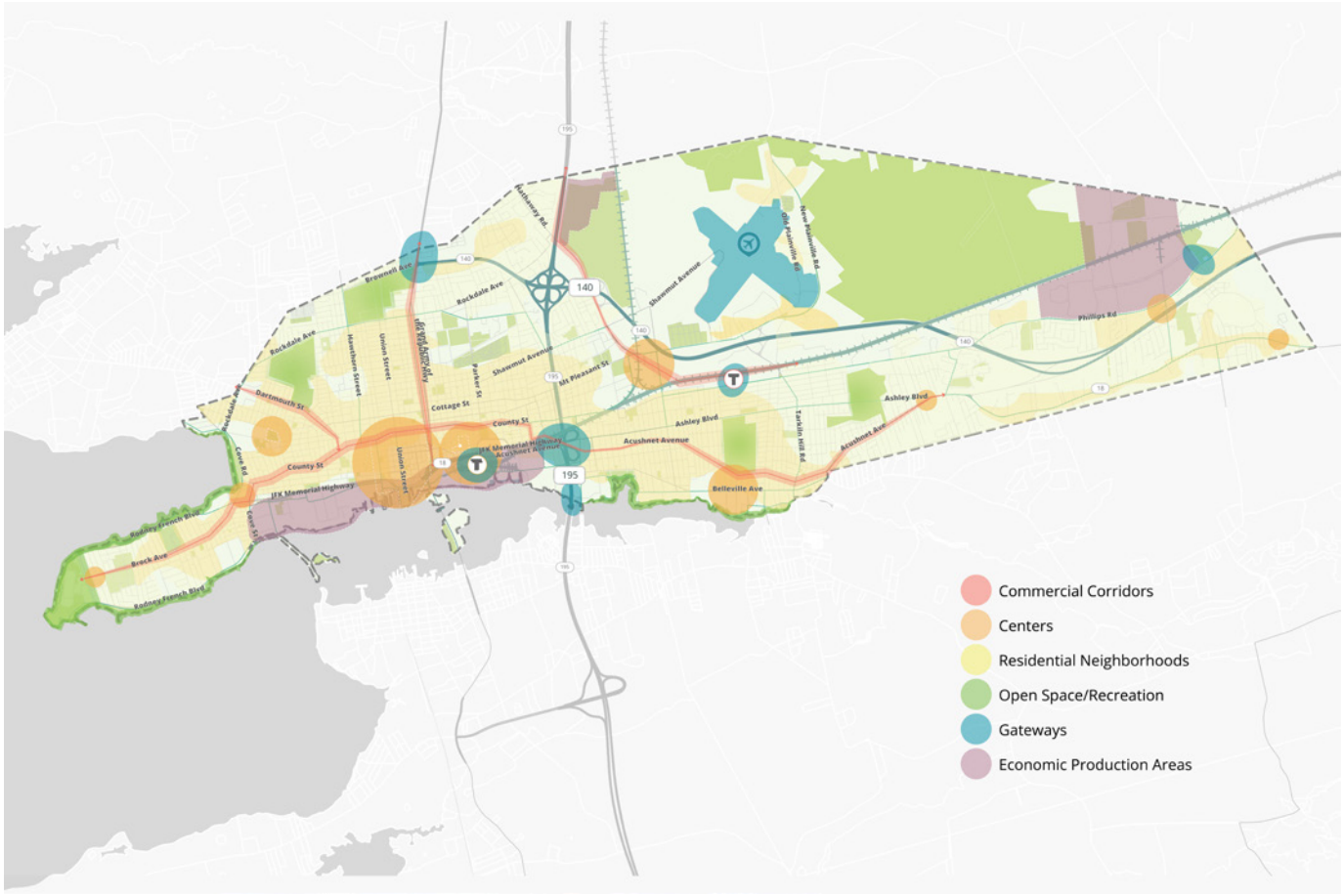
Area Studies

Area studies illustrate how the Plan's recommendations for future land use could be implemented in specific parts of the city.

These land use area studies illustrate potential land use activities in a few chosen areas; while not exhaustive of every city neighborhood, they are intended to inform future land use plans for additional areas of the city with similar characteristics.

ILLUSTRATIVE AREA STUDIES:

- **CENTER:** Downtown and the Central Waterfront
- **EMERGING HUB:** Airport Commerce District/Hathaway Road/ Mt. Pleasant/Church Street
- **NEIGHBORHOOD/COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR:** Acushnet Avenue/North End
- **TRANSIT ORIENTED/GATEWAY:** Armory/Clasky Common
- **BUTTONWOOD PARK GATEWAY:** Kempton Street Corridor



CENTER

Knitting Together Downtown and the Central Waterfront



From whaling to textiles and from fishing to offshore wind, the major industries of the city have depended on the ocean to deliver critical resources. Naturally, as the city grew, supportive industries and institutional and governmental infrastructure located in proximity to the port, which established downtown and the adjacent waterfront as the original center of New Bedford.

Today, downtown remains the historical, cultural and institutional center of the city. It is a compact grid of walkable streets that reflect over two centuries of urban evolution. Bounded by its proximity to the central waterfront, the downtown is distinguished by its 19th-century architecture, cobblestone streets, gas lamps, and a vibrant mix of civic and cultural institutions, galleries, shops, restaurants, and residences. At its center is the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, which encompasses 34 acres spread across 13 city blocks, including the New Bedford Historic District, a national historic landmark district designated in 1966. The National Park, along with the Whaling Museum, New Bedford Art Museum, the Fishing Heritage Center, and the Zeiterion Performing Arts Center, draw visitors from across the globe into the downtown.

Downtown continues to adapt to support the needs of a growing city – at the time of writing this plan, nearly one hundred new apartments have been developed, and equally more are slated for imminent development, either as new construction or through rehabilitating existing historic buildings. These recent residential developments complement the ongoing revitalization of the city's core by enhancing housing availability and stimulating economic growth. However, sound land use strategies will be needed to support this rapid growth in one of the densest areas of the city and to ensure that the downtown remains inclusive, connected and economically resilient.

Similarly, continued investment in the port infrastructure has sustained New Bedford's status as the nation's top commercial fishing port by value for over two decades. The majority of seafood landed in the port is processed locally, along with seafood brought in from other ports. In addition to fishing and seafood processing, the Port of New Bedford supports a host of businesses, including warehousing, boatyards, ship repair, construction, tug assistance, and marine engineering. The ongoing investment in port infrastructure to support the offshore wind industry demonstrates how New Bedford remains engaged in the global economy through the continued evolution of the Port. Collaborative planning between the various waterfront stakeholders and governing entities is essential to develop land use policies flexible enough to allow the maritime industries to capitalize on the opportunities of today and strategic enough to support long-term competitiveness.

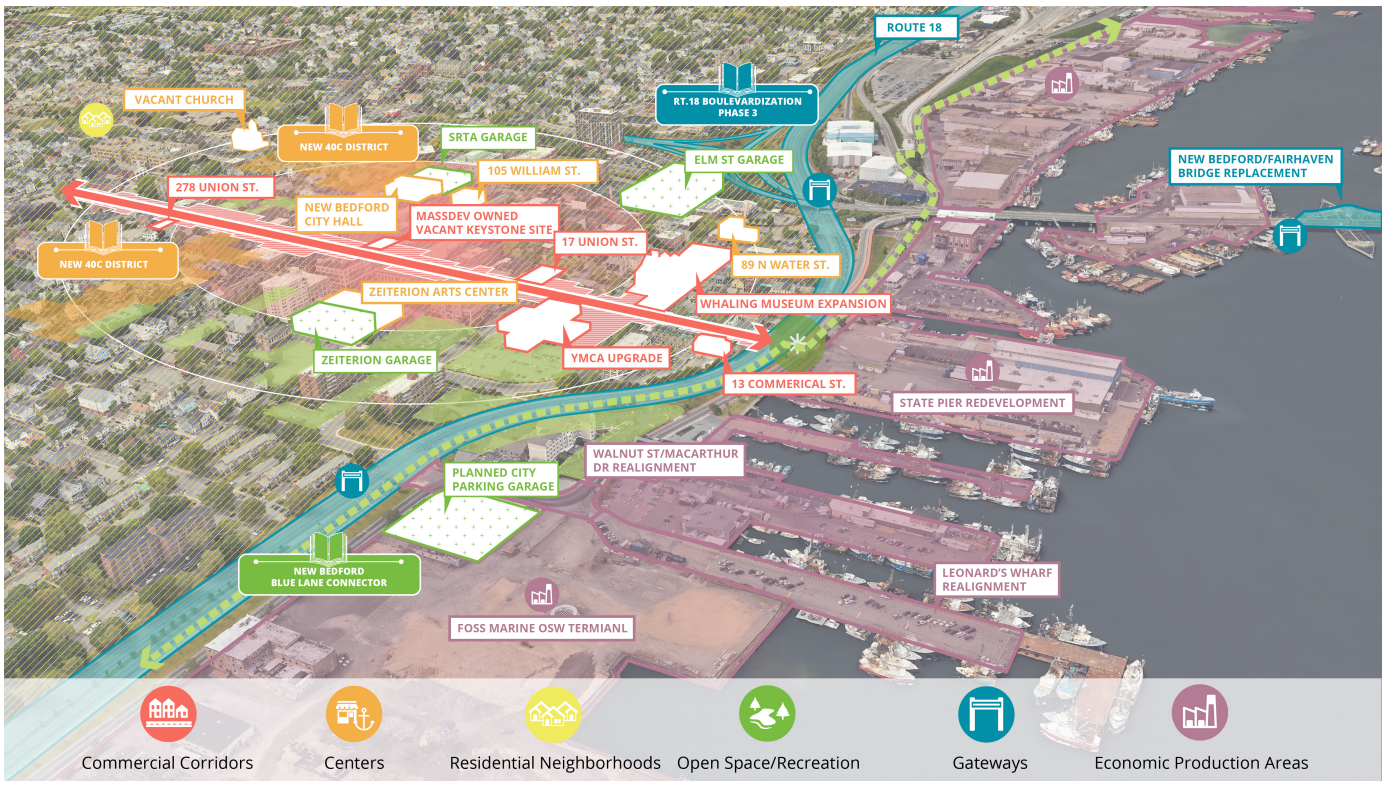
New Bedford's downtown and its central waterfront share a common origin story, both shaped by the city's deep harbor and maritime economy. However, JFK Boulevard bisects the downtown from the waterfront and acts as a physical and psychological barrier between the two areas. Originally constructed to accommodate industrial traffic and urban renewal-era goals, the highway effectively severs the city's historic downtown from its port, limiting pedestrian access, diminishing visual and physical connectivity, and undermining opportunities to further integrate the waterfront and the city.

The City recognizes this hindrance and has made efforts to reintegrate these two vital areas. Twelve years ago, JFK Boulevard's arterial highway design was redeveloped as a four-lane boulevard with a lower design speed and improved pedestrian access between the downtown and the port. A recently awarded federal grant is funding preconstruction planning for the Blue Lane Connector. This complete street infrastructure project will further enhance the connectivity between the downtown area to the industrial port facilities.

At the heart of the port is the State Pier, which is the hub for waterborne commercial and passenger activity. The 8-acre property is owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and managed by MassDevelopment. The city has long advocated for the transformative redevelopment of this underutilized asset into a dynamic, mixed-use hub that honors the city's maritime heritage while embracing future economic opportunities. The State has issued Requests for Proposals, and at the time of writing this plan, is reviewing a number of development proposals which propose a mix of traditional waterfront uses, such as cruise boat docking and offshore wind operational facilities with service-oriented uses such as seafood markets and restaurants.

Beyond the State Pier, the Port of New Bedford has recently completed implementing their 2018-2023 Strategic Plan. The Port recognizes the importance of incremental planning to respond to the changing needs of the maritime industries and recreational boaters who depend on a clear management vision for this crucial asset. Therefore, a new strategic plan will be developed in 2026 to complement the Municipal Harbo Plan update, which is currently underway, and which will inform future land use strategies for the waterfront.

The City will continue in its efforts to improve the integration of the waterfront with the city's urban fabric and utilize sound planning with human-scale design and placemaking elements in shaping a seamless relationship that reflects the city's needs and aspirations.



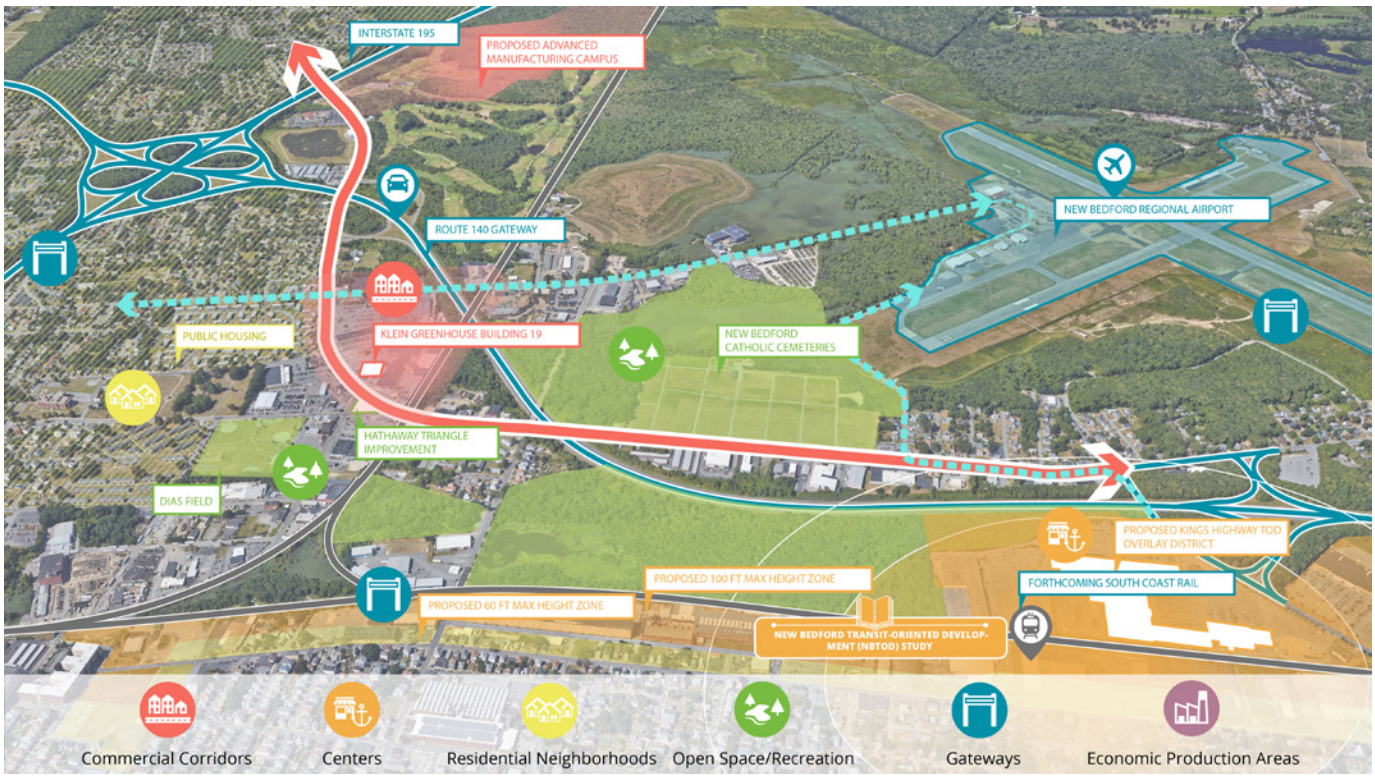
EMERGING HUB

Airport Commerce District/Hathaway Road/Mt. Pleasant/Church Street

Hathaway Road runs through an area of the city that has often been overlooked in previous long-term planning efforts. Proximate to the airport, rail, and Route 140, it is primed to be a transportation hub. Decades of patchwork and car-centric plaza development, wide boulevards and heavy industrial traffic traveling on Shawmut Avenue have created a roadway that is unfriendly to pedestrians, cyclists and people unfamiliar with the area. Recent investments in the Mt. Pleasant Street/Hathaway Road intersection demonstrate it is possible to implement traffic calming and redesign the roadway to accommodate all users.

The transportation and development advantages of this area are evident in the decision to set aside a portion of the municipal golf course land for the development of an Advanced Manufacturing Campus (AMC) on Hathaway Road. In the short-term, it will be crucial to manage planning efforts around the development of the AMC site, associated alterations to the golf course layout, and roadway improvements on Hathaway Road between Rockdale Avenue and Shawmut Avenue, including the Route 140 interchange. Long-term planning efforts should focus on realizing the vision of the AMC while implementing zoning that is flexible to shifting market demands.

Outside of the AMC, land use planning in this area should focus on continuing to improve the roadway to manage traffic, engaging owners of large industrial parcels in planning efforts, and supporting the improvement and beautification of the airport approaches on Shawmut Avenue, Nash Road, and Mt. Pleasant Street. Land use planning must support infill development at the fringes of the Hathaway Road area that complements and does not conflict with the established residential neighborhoods south and east of this industrial and commercial center.



Acushnet Avenue/North End

Referred to colloquially as "The Ave," Acushnet Avenue is the central economic corridor of the city's north end. This distinct, diverse neighborhood is characterized by its linear commercial spine of small business storefronts on the ground story of one- and two-story tenement structures along with ethnic restaurants, cafes, bakeries, churches and social clubs. The Ave has long been an immigrant enclave, and it has recently shifted from predominantly Portuguese to Central American neighborhood. Still, the Ave today is a true melting pot of the cultures and traditions of the people of New Bedford, which is reflected in the variety of food, cultural events, and public art throughout the neighborhood.

The neighborhood framework – businesses, triple-deckers, streets, and an anchor park— creates a dense, walkable neighborhood. At the center of the District is the historic landmark St. Anthony's Church, which serves as the spiritual and social center for many of the neighborhood residents. To the east of the neighborhood is the 22-acre Riverside Park, which was once a brownfield site remediated into an active green space with athletic fields, passive space, picnic tables and playgrounds.

Although the district has seen recent successes with its designation as a MassDevelopment Transformative Development Initiative District, pockets of disinvestment remain with vacant storefronts and underutilized buildings and a visual blight remains in the commercial corridor. Two recent structure fires have resulted in vacant lots within the commercial corridor. This "broken tooth" scenario has resulted in prominent neglected spaces which disrupt the streetscape and economic continuity. Two industrial brownfield sites which bookend Riverside Park and another on western edge of the neighborhood have the potential for contextual redevelopment. A minor, but recurring, complexity to development are numerous split-zoned lots along the Avenue.



Ten years ago, a major streetscape improvement project upgraded the initial gateway section of the Avenue, leaving a stark contrast and disparities of public realm amenities between the old and new. Continuing streetscaping best practices will improve corridor conditions and pedestrian and bicycle safety.

The Acushnet River, a defining feature of New Bedford's North End, has long been hidden from public use by decades of industrial development, pollution, and physical barriers, but the planned multi-use RiverWalk promises to transform it into a signature neighborhood and city asset. Originating in the 2008 Upper Harbor Vision Plan, the Riverwalk offers a transformative opportunity to unlock previously inaccessible riverfront for public use while spurring private investment and economic development in the Near North End. By reclaiming and restoring the shoreline with scenic overlooks, fishing piers, kayak launches, and climate-resilient design, the project will enhance neighborhood livability, attract new businesses, and catalyze redevelopment along the corridor. Careful design and strategic land acquisition, potentially through the New Bedford Redevelopment Authority, will be essential to realizing this vision.

NEIGHBORHOOD/COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR – ACUSHNET AVENUE/ NORTH END



Armory/Clasky Common

The transit-oriented gateway within the Clasky Common and Armory District is ideally situated within a ten-minute walk of downtown and waterfront businesses, yet it remains physically separated by JFK Boulevard and other major roadways. The current southbound approach on JFK Boulevard to downtown and State Pier is largely made up of industrial buildings in various stages of use, vacant lots, and surface parking lots. The underdeveloped nature of this primary gateway to the city presents an opportunity for mixed-use development and creation of an exciting gateway to New Bedford's historic downtown, to tourism, arts and culture, and to jobs in the industrial port just beyond.

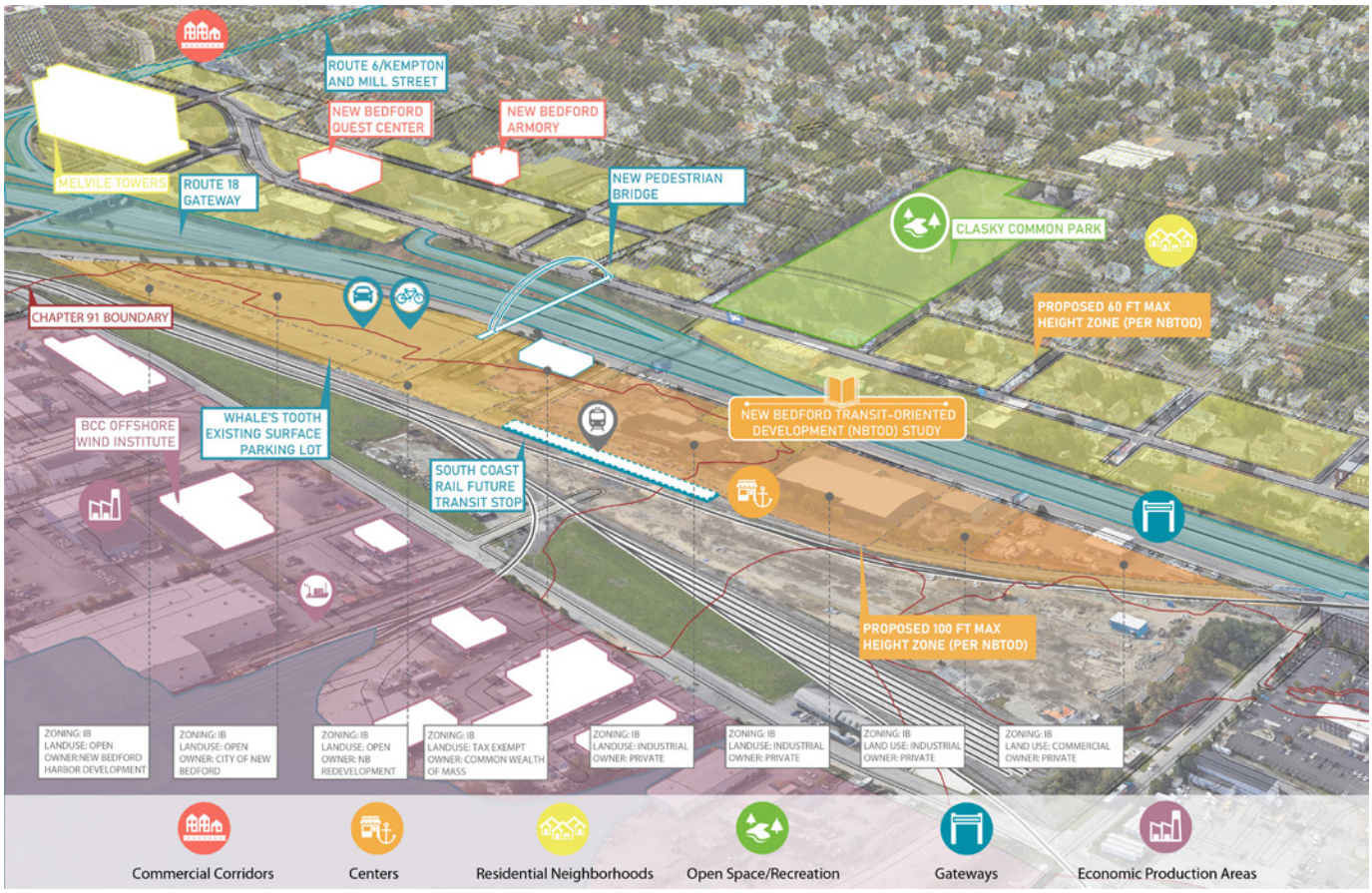
This area is undergoing significant transformation with the opening of the intercity rail platform, further positioning New Bedford as the center city to the region. A newly constructed and highly prominent pedestrian bridge over JFK Boulevard now connects the Clasky Common neighborhood with the rail station platform and the central waterfront. Building on this intercity rail investment, the city has secured state and federal funding for major roadway infrastructure improvements within the district. The Purchase Street corridor and MacArthur Drive and Herman Melville Boulevard Blue Lane upgrades are expected to stimulate development, enhance equity, and improve the quality of life for District residents.

The proposed Clasky Common TOD Overlay District will build upon these investments with the intent to expand housing options near transit across a range of price points while fostering inclusive, mixed-use development that enhances the area's vitality and community connections. This includes creating vibrant neighborhoods with amenities such as offices, artist studios, retail stores, restaurants, and coffee shops. Efforts will also focus on generating jobs and economic opportunities for New Bedford through compatible light industrial and commercial uses. Furthermore, development will prioritize accessibility and transit-oriented solutions to promote sustainable growth.

The TOD Overlay District is designed to preserve existing uses while encouraging significant investment and physical transformation in areas with untapped potential for high walkability and transit access. These areas are well-suited to support substantial job creation and higher-density housing alongside complementary commercial uses. The district also encourages mixed-use development on vacant or underutilized properties within walkable, transit-accessible locations.

Future development within the TOD District will be guided by two distinct zones. The first, located between the rail lines and JFK Boulevard, will allow building heights up to 100 feet. Anchored by the passenger rail station, this area will be defined by the dominant presence of surrounding infrastructure and its proximity to the harbor. The second zone, situated along the western edge of JFK Boulevard, will have a 60-foot height limit and is designated for mixed-use development. This area will accommodate more distributed growth, providing a transition between the larger-scale district fabric and the adjacent residential neighborhoods to the west.

TRANSIT ORIENTED/GATEWAY - ARMORY/CLASKY COMMON



BUTTONWOOD PARK GATEWAY

Kempton Street Corridor

Commercial gateway corridors play a critical role in the economic, social, and aesthetic fabric of a city. These corridors serve as key entry points into urban areas and often shape first impressions of the city while functioning as vital hubs of activity and connectivity.

The Kempton Street Corridor is a primary entryway into the city via Route 140, influencing visitors' perceptions and contributing to the city's identity. Anchoring this gateway is Buttonwood Park, a significant Olmsted-designed landscape featuring a regional zoo, which stands as a prominent community asset and is the number one regional tourist attraction.

The Kempton Street commercial corridor plays a vital role in the city, hosting numerous retail and service businesses and serving as a key thoroughfare for vehicles and public transportation. While Buttonwood Park enhances the area as a historic and community destination, the park's Kempton Street edge lacks pedestrian-friendly design. Currently, the corridor is dominated by auto-centric strip retail developments with prominent surface parking lots, creating a streetscape where buildings are disconnected from the roadway. This layout diminishes vibrancy and contributes to poor walkability and bikeability, further compounded by the large-scale roadways and the disjointed relationship between buildings and the street.

There is a great opportunity to revitalize this corridor to stimulate economic growth, attract investment, and enhance the urban environment while showcasing the park's significant Olmsted landscape. The gateway arrival to the City should be welcoming and reflective of the diversity and cultural character of the city through unique local businesses and public art.

Current improvements along the Kempton Street corridor include a green infrastructure project which will improve stormwater treatment, increase permeable surfaces to promote infiltration and provide landscape improvements which will enhance the appearance of this critical corridor. The northern edge of Buttonwood Park is being improved with rain gardens, tree planting and the addition of walking trails.

To further improve this corridor, future actions should focus on public realm enhancements, prioritizing pedestrian safety, regional bike connections, and pgrading streetscapes with features such as improved lighting, landscaping, and signage. Zoning and regulatory measures should encourage relocating parking to the rear of properties in new developments and increasing site density by incorporating residential units above big-box retail spaces.



IMPLEMENTATION

Roles and Responsibilities

Implementation is the process of taking action to meet the goals and fulfill the vision identified in this planning process.

The City of New Bedford is currently undergoing more concurrent departmental and community-based planning than at any other time in the city's history, this Comprehensive Plan is the essential element needed to link these individual plans and initiatives together, providing a unifying vision for the city's future growth. These efforts are detailed in the review on page 45. Generally, the recommendation from this planning process is that departments should continue to engage in their individual strategic plans using the City's data and performance management criteria to devise metrics for tracking progress and to share their goals and progress towards those goals internally and with the public.

However, there is responsibility beyond the City departmental role in implementation. Crucially, the Planning Board is responsible for creating and updating the comprehensive plan under MGL Chapter 41, Section 81D, and the Mayor and City Council have critical responsibilities in directing policy changes and approving funding requests. Several City boards and committees will be tasked with adopting procedures and policies that further the goals of the plan. Other entities, such as the New Bedford Economic Development Council, New Bedford Creative Consortium, DNB Inc., Love the Ave, the Port Authority, and the New Bedford Ocean Cluster must take the mantle and advance the goals related to their specific niches in the city and regional economy. Citizens, businesses, partner institutions and organizations are responsible for advocacy, leadership, and other initiatives that share the vision of the plan. Systematically together we can achieve the outlined objectives, ensure sustainable and inclusive growth for the city, and foster a thriving community that honors its heritage while embracing opportunities today and in the future.

It is important to remember this plan provides a roadmap, and we must maintain flexibility. As we progress, we may need to re-evaluate priorities based on the outcomes of completed actions, changes in local and global markets, and evolving demographic and cultural trends. New Bedford's unique position as a global port city means that we must be prepared to adapt to both local and international influences.

Implementation Needs

City Capacity & Budget

The successful implementation of this plan hinges on two key resources to be successful:

City Capacity: Requires dedicated time and attention from City officials, staff, and boards and commission members. While external partners can assist, City departments will typically lead the execution of recommended actions and City officials will adopt the recommended policies. Collaboration is crucial for effective implementation.

Funding: Aligning annual departmental budgets with plan goals enables departmental action and a way to review resource allocation and early identification of any implementation challenges. Collecting benchmark data and tracking metrics can provide detailed information about successful implementation or the need for additional resources. Collaborative and transparent budgeting can position the city to seek additional State and federal grants to supplement and, in many cases, exceed the city's funding allocation for projects.

Zoning Revisions

A comprehensive plan serves as the City's roadmap for future land use development, and zoning is the legal mechanism to implement that vision.

The City is already working on zoning changes that could be incorporated into a broad-based update. These in-progress changes include the following:

- Transit Oriented Development Zoning (TOD), around the new commuter rail stations.
- Form-based Code District which integrates design considerations and illustrations into the traditionally text-based zoning ordinance.
- Reviewing and modifying dimensional regulations.
- Updating the Table of Uses
- Adding design and sustainable development standards
- Updating site plan review regulations.

Other changes recommended in this comprehensive plan are mostly placed-based, and could be incorporated into specific neighborhood or corridor zones. However, overlaps exist across neighborhoods. A hybrid form-based code could identify common housing and commercial building types and related standards which would allow a more global update to the zoning ordinance rather than a neighborhood-by-neighborhood strategy.

The City should first identify any clusters of changes, based on building type, area of the city, and ability to support other goals of this plan. This identification allows the City to cluster zoning changes in groups, allowing a more efficient update process.

DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING
133 WILLIAM STREET NEW BEDFORD, MA
WWW.NEWBEDFORD-MA.GOV

lighting the way
new bedford